



Remodel Your Relationship*

***Refresh and insure it will last**

By Ken Johnston

“Remodel Your Relationship”

happierrelationships.com

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(Nobody likes to read this kind of stuff. We wish we didn't have to do it.)

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Love is everywhere.

Re-model a Relationship

Note: The terms "marriage" and "relationship" are used interchangeably throughout the book. Fifty years ago virtually all couples who were committed to each other, got married. Today, it's not uncommon to find couples who are just as committed, simply living together. To reflect these realities, we use relationship and marriage throughout the book to mean the same thing.

Can marriages really be re-modeled?

Yes! The answer is a resounding "Yes!" Marriages can be remodeled, improved, saved, rescued, revived, and made loving again.

The secret is to understand the structure, identify the key problems and perhaps change some of your strongly held beliefs, ideas, thoughts, and expectations about marriage. It turns out, once you understand what kills relationships — as well as what nourishes them — then you'll know that when they die, it's because we kill them ourselves.

Much of what you think you know about relationships might well be wrong. Relationships seem so terribly complex because we keep doing the same wrong things over and over again, and somehow we expect different results.

This book ends with the incredibly popular "Ridiculously Simple Secrets to Great Relationships," which is a digest of the real secrets of great relationships. This book, the audio/video programs, the practices, and the Forum will teach you everything you need to know to turn an ordinary partnership into a great relationship. With what you learn here, you can truly "re-model" your marriage more easily and less expensively than you would remodel a home.

The best part is that you can do it by yourself, or, if your partner is willing, you can both work on creating a great relationship. If you're simply dying of curiosity, you can jump ahead to the end of the book and read "Ridiculously Simple Secrets To A Great Relationship." It won't hurt, and you'll more fully understand where this book, the audio/video course and practices are taking you. But, make sure to come right back here. If you've already read the last chapter, just proceed from here.

HERE

The Relationship is Committed

Marriage — or moving in to live together — is the real start of the relationship. You've already had attraction, courting, maybe infatuation, and you've formed bonds of love from your shared experiences made stronger by powerful emotions.

As the relationship proceeds after that, "issues" will arise. Issues are points of difference between partners that create bad feelings for one or both of them. The partners easily deal with most issues. He puts the toilet seat down because it upsets her to fall in when she backs in, in the dark. She stops hanging her lingerie on the shower curtain rod because it gets in the way when he showers. These are the normal, natural changes people make when the change doesn't affect deeply held opinions, self-visions, goals, or life decisions. (In other words, the cost of change is low.)

A second set of issues always arises. These issues are not easily resolved, and in fact, may well be irresolvable. To over simply somewhat, *the way the partners deal with the irresolvable issues may determine the long-term fate of the relationship.*

Irresolvable Issues

Irresolvable issues typically stem from 'life decisions' or 'self-images' that cause the partners to be or behave in ways that conflict with each other. Several examples may help clarify the kinds of issues that are irresolvable. In other words, these are issues that will never go away.

Example: "How to discipline the kids"

This one is really tough because you can't discover this difference until you have kids together, and unless one of you already has kids, you may not discover the issue for years after you are living together.

He grew up in a family where the father was gone most of the time and his mother raised him and his brothers and sisters. His mother wasn't interested in disciplining the kids. She worked a lot of the time, and when she wasn't working, she frequently escaped into the ever-present vodka bottle.

So, the kids grew up with little parental guidance. Both of his sisters got into sex and drugs very early. His brother joined a gang and had a few run-ins with the police. He was the "good" kid, studied hard, got good grades, and was the only one to go to college.

While he was growing up and watching what was happening to his family, he grew to despise his mother (and his mostly absent father), for not giving his siblings the guidance and discipline he saw that they needed.

Lacking any role model for parenting, he watched how his friends' families guided and disciplined them, and vowed, "When I grow up, I'm going to be with my kids every step of the way to guide them and discipline them the way I see other families doing it."

She, on the other hand, had somewhat the opposite experience while growing up. Her mother and father were strict disciplinarians. They were super strict, didn't trust any of the kids, didn't trust any of their friends, and generally made life pretty uncomfortable for their kids.

The parents were with their children every step of the way. They helped them with their studies, urged them to get top grades, and even B+ wasn't good enough. The father, in particular, bullied the kids about their grades and enforced unrealistic curfews as they grew into their teens.

While she was growing up, she felt smothered by the constant vigilance. She felt real anger at not being trusted, even though she was very trustworthy. She couldn't wait to get through high school and off to college to get away from her parents suffocating omnipresence.

She vowed, "When I grow up, I'm going to trust my kids, give them some space, and encourage them to do well, but not 'bully' them."

While they were dating, he met her parents. One of the things he found wonderful about her, in fact, was the way her parents seemed so protective about her and her siblings. He actually thought she would make an ideal mother because she had experienced such good parenting.

They enjoyed a great relationship after they were married. Their love grew, and they were flexible about resolving the annoying little issues that every couple encounters.

Things turned sour about the time their baby boy was two. As the child began needing the parenting that two-year-olds require, they discovered that they had really different ideas about how to parent.

He was all over the kid, smothering him, she thought. She was too loose with him, endangering him, he thought. So, this issue, which had lain dormant between them, popped up to become a constant, every-day issue between them that led to painful, hurtful, fights and arguments. They tried counseling, but their own opinions — indeed their vows and promises to themselves — were unshakable.

They had stumbled on an "irresolvable issue."

What Happens With an Irresolvable Issue

An irresolvable issue is one that can't be resolved by the couple. Neither party will change their point of view because of decisions or vows they made about how they would live their life, when they were young.

Counseling can't and doesn't fix those kinds of issues. Neither party is willing to change and is convinced that the other party needs to change.

The duration of the relationship depends, in large measure, on the way a couple deals with "issues."

Research proves that 'issue' discussions that start from a positive base and end on a positive note, are the secret to a lasting relationship.

If 'issue' discussions start with anger, disgust, fear, or frustration, and end with worse feelings than they started, the odds are enormous that they will lead to divorce.

There are really only two overall secrets to relationships that last. One is a positivity ratio of 5 to 1. (We'll talk about this shortly.)

The other is the success or failure of the couple to handle 'issue' discussions in a way that leaves the couple feeling good about each other when they are over.

So, 'issue' discussions are really, really, important.

Every couple will discover somewhere between three and eight irresolvable issues that will be with them for the duration of their relationship. It would be a miracle if your relationship didn't have some.

That leads to two of our "Ridiculously Simple Secrets to a Great Relationship."

Ridiculously Simple Secrets:

Identify the irresolvable conflict issues that are, or will be in your relationship. Make a go/no-go decision on that issue before marriage, if possible. If you marry in spite of being aware of the issue, then cope with it and don't waste your breath arguing or fighting about it. In other words, NEVER FIGHT OVER AN IRRESOLVABLE ISSUE.

The duration of your relationship will depend largely on how well your partnership can resolve or accept your differences over issues, whether changeable or irresolvable. So, if you can't learn to fight successfully, with a positive start, and a loving end, DON'T FIGHT AT ALL!

Coping

Coping is the process of dealing immediately with bad feelings (so they don't fester and grow), and deciding whether the issue can be resolved with action, or resolved with negotiation, or whether it must be accepted and/or forgiven. If you learn to cope successfully, you will have bad feeling episodes less often — for a shorter duration — and they will block the erosion of your accumulation of loving feelings.

When you can shift immediately from strong negative emotions into a questioning mode — where you engage your mind with questions — you will cope successfully with issues, rather than allowing emotions to rule.

Effective coping will enable you to have fewer, shorter, and milder episodes of bad feelings about your partner.

You're going to learn an incredibly powerful coping skill. You'll learn to cope with any difficulty or 'issue' by asking four questions, and making one of four wise choices. You'll discover something magical. Your partner doesn't have to change or be different for you to be happy with your partner and your relationship. So, you don't need to make the kinds of demands or requests from your partner that get you into fights, arguments, or disagreements over 'issues' whether resolvable or not.

Marking

Marking is a process wherein you:

- remember a positive experience shared with your partner
- recall it vividly
- re-experience the good feelings you had at that time
- and engage many of your senses in marking your memory.

You mark it by reminding your partner about it, or telling someone about it, or if alone, just laugh, and smile, and tell yourself about it.

Marking takes a loving shared experience and makes it larger, or stronger. Marking reinforces the bond, and increases feelings of love for your partner.

A Truly Magnificent Relationship

You can create a truly magnificent relationship by resolving all bad feeling episodes as quickly as possible, and marking all present and past good feeling episodes as strongly as you can. By making a habit of coping and marking, you maximize the benefits of shared good experiences and minimize the damage of shared bad experiences.

The net effect is to enable the bonds of love to grow over time and get stronger and stronger. In case you haven't already figured it out, our advice is to have as many positive shared experiences with your partner as possible before you marry or begin to live together. The bonds formed by those good, shared experiences cement the bonds of love that will give you something to build on, and protect you from the hazards of the reality that every day issues of living together will present.

Positivity

Positivity refers to the ratio of positive to negative messages one partner gives the other. The messages can be verbal or physical. Messages can be given by gestures, attending, or

just listening. Successful marriages — with a very low risk of divorce — maintain a positivity ratio of at least 5 to 1. Negative messages are so damaging that it takes 5 positive messages to repair the damage. And *really* negative messages take even more.

Start "issue" discussions positively and end them positively.

Couples with high positivity should find it easy to start 'issue' discussions respectfully and with a positive tone. Discussions that start positively have a much better chance of actually achieving a good result. Whether the discussion achieved a successful result or not, it's important that the discussion also end on a positive note.

Irresolvable issues are best treated with humor and acceptance, rather than 'discussions.' When happily married couples are studied, the researches almost always find that the couple has found ways to laugh or kid about the irresolvable issues. It's clear that they have to come to terms with the issue, have accepted that the difference exists, and that it won't diminish the love they have for one another.

Half of all Marriages End in Divorce

Divorce is an enormous penalty to pay for marital mistakes. Divorce affects far more people than just the two in the relationship. Families, children, neighbors, friends and co-workers are all affected negatively when a marriage breaks up. So, it's important to know that sick marriages can be revived. The skills that it takes to make a great marriage can be easily learned and made into habits.

Marriages in Decline

Relationships decline when there is low positivity, and when 'issue' discussions start poorly and get worse.

If one or both of the parties are volatile and explosive, issue discussions turn quickly into fights. Fights turn quickly into hurtful, exaggerated, insulting, and degrading affairs that create a very negative, powerfully emotional shared bad experience.

One partner or both can make the damage worse by replaying the experience over again in memory. In the same way that it is valuable to 'mark' good, loving experiences to build loving bonds, it is damaging to 'mark' bad, hateful experiences by reliving and remembering them.

If your 'issue' discussions are hurtful and unproductive, don't have them. You'll learn in this book some coping techniques that will allow you to resolve and accept the 'issue' without the need for argument or fighting.

If you have a really negative, emotionally-charged, shared experience, resolve the bad feelings as quickly as you regain access to reason. Coping effectively can minimize the damage and slow the decline. You'll learn the skills in the Audio/Visual program "Four

Questions and a Map,” or its text version, if you don’t have broadband access to the Internet.

If you’ve been in a fight — and expressed damaging messages — get busy as quickly as you can, to give enough positive messages to repair the damage.

“Hot” Marriages Don’t Last Long

According to Dr. John Gottman, (the best marriage researcher in the country in our opinion): volatile couples who fight explosively with damaging and hurtful messages and strong negative emotions are on track to divorce within three to five years ... or maybe even in the first year. This explains those couples who are practically on their way to divorce before all the ‘thank you’ notes are written.

“Cold” Marriages Last Longer, But Still End up in Divorce

Sometimes one or both parties will attempt to get back at their partner for negative messages or hurtful ‘issue’ discussions, by withdrawal or withholding. One way to stay out of fights is just not to talk to your partner. Another way to fight without seeming to fight is to simply withhold affection, services, attention, or sexual participation.

Withdrawal and withholding will protect against damaging fights, but they *are* negative and eliminate the positivity required to make the relationship nourishing and rewarding.

This kind of marriage is most likely to divorce around twelve to sixteen years.

When we say, “Don’t fight,” that means more than just avoiding loud and hurtful discussions. It means wisely accepting the differences between you and your partner. Acceptance and forgiveness are the wisest way to cope with ‘issues’ that won’t be resolved by action or negotiation.

According to Dr. Gottman, if your fights are explosive, emotional, and hurtful, you’d better hurry and change things around. You don’t have much time.

If you now realize that you are in a partnership where there is a lot of withdrawal and withholding, you’ve got more time, but you’re still headed for disaster unless you turn the relationship around.

How Do You Turn a Sick Relationship Around?

Turning a sick relationship around is easy to describe and hard to do. It involves four steps and enormous commitment and persistence.

Step 1. It may be useful to tell your partner that you recognize you have problems, and you are going to take some steps with hopes of making the relationship better. Tell your partner that you are doing this out of love, and hope for a better future. Ask your partner to recognize that you will make mistakes and stumble and fall from time to time, but you intend to persist and make the

relationship work. It is valuable to free your partner from any blame and take all the responsibility onto yourself.

- Step 2.** Begin immediately to practice being positive. Give your partner at least five and maybe eight positive messages for every negative message. Be alert at all times for ways to offer a positive message.
- Step 3.** Identify all of the irresolvable issues between you, and practice handling those issues with acceptance, forgiveness, and humor. If your partner demands changes from you — on an irresolvable issue — treat your partner respectfully, decline to discuss it (because you are convinced it is irresolvable), and raise the positivity and humor level to show an effort to make amends.
- Step 4.** Mentally commit to start the relationship over. Remember the love with which you two started out. Mark the bonding experiences that once held you close. Cope wisely with any negative feelings that arise because you are doing all the work. With high positivity, few if any negative ‘issue’ discussions, and by marking and helping your partner re-experience the positive experiences with which you bonded, you can restore the relationship to a healthy, loving state (if your partner is willing).

It’s all Here

Everything you need to learn, and everything you need to practice has been brought together for you — in one place — with the experts who can help you if you get stuck. At the same time you have access to a bunch of other people who are mastering the same skills at the same time, and who understand what you are going through and the gift you are giving your partner.

You can’t really lose. If you learn these skills, and practice them, but your partner is steering your relationship toward divorce, you will be incredibly well equipped to make your next relationship succeed.

Where are we going? How will we get there?

Your goal will be to protect the love remaining in the relationship and focus on growing more and more positive bonds throughout your relationship. You just have to learn the simple coping skills and believe that they are important skills to use. To some extent you want to give up the easy, automatic ways you might have used to handle relationship issues, in order to build new habits that will help you keep the relationship on track to becoming magnificent.

The process involves three things.

1. Coping with bad feelings to minimize the damage.

As soon as possible after you share a negative experience with your partner, you'll want to ask yourself four questions, and choose one of four choices. At first, until it becomes a habit, you'll have to remember to do it. Gradually, it will become automatic, and you'll be a master at coping with difficulties.

2. Exaggerating good feelings to maximize the benefit.

Most people just enjoy positive shared experiences with their partner and make no special effort to mark them, or note them, so that they will stand out in your huge body of memories.

You'll want to do it differently. Since these positive, shared, emotional experiences will add to your collection of positive bonds, give them lots of attention. Speak about them. Write them down in a diary. Sing about them. Do something to mark them and make them special.

3. Manage your memories so you think often of the good times, and seldom of the bad ones.

You're going to learn about looping, which is what we call the thing you do when you wallow in some strong feeling : you experience and re-experience the feelings again and again.

We suggest you master the art of breaking the loop when you're recalling a bad experience shared with your partner. You do that by asking the four questions.

We suggest you master the art of looping as long as you can on positive shared experiences. This will add to your bonds of loving good feelings.

Coping Handles Bad Feelings

The first thing you'll learn in this video/book/practices/Forum package is coping skills. As you learn and use these simple coping skills, you'll see that you have fewer and fewer bad feelings, even bad memories, and more and stronger good feelings.

You don't *have* to learn these skills; you can make your own way through this process and skip what you don't want, and just do what you do want.

On the other hand, if you make the effort to learn these simple coping skills, you'll have a great tool you can use in every aspect of your life, for your own happiness, for family issues, for work issues, etc.

Marking Reinforces Good Feelings

We've already talked about how you'll learn to use those coping skills in "Four Questions and a Map." I want to remind you again that you can use the coping skills to purposely magnify the good feelings, if you learn to notice good feelings when they arise.

Your Goal: A Truly Magnificent Relationship

You're going to learn all the skills you need to create a truly magnificent relationship with your present partner.

If you're doing this remodeling of your relationship on your own, the coping skills will help you handle the frustration you may feel from having the entire burden on your shoulders. If you are doing this remodeling in conjunction with your partner, we have some advice for you.

Remodeling in conjunction with your partner

When you first start out, see if you can do it without much discussion. You might decide to have a discussion of the material on a set schedule ... like every other Monday evening. If the discussion starts well, is useful, and ends positively, then continue on schedule, or even start discussing it weekly.

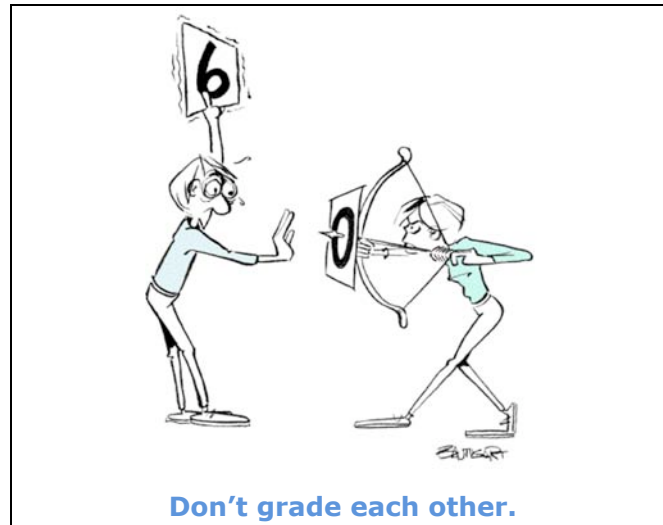
Remember, this is process of self-change. You each will change at different speeds and in different ways. The risk you run by doing it together is that the material itself, and the way you each use it, could become an 'issue' in one of those messy 'issue' discussions.

So, as long as the discussion sessions are positive and you each end up with more positive feelings about each other when it's over, keep them up. The first time one of these sessions proves to be hurtful or negative, delay the next one for a month. Then, let each of you use the four questions to resolve any bad feelings that might have arisen.

We know many couples that have remodeled their kitchens, or their whole house. We've seen how remodeling something as inanimate as a house can bring a relationship into crisis. Building a whole house from scratch has, upon occasion, proven so stressful that it has destroyed the marriage.

Imagine how much more dangerous it is to remodel something as personal and intimate as your relationship. Don't count on *joint effort* at remodeling your relationship will bring you closer together. It might even strain your relationship further.

For those reasons, we suggest caution. Each of you go forward on your own. *Promise to do your best never to use what you learn to show your partner where they were wrong all along.* You don't want to hear, "Aha, now I see why you've been such an %#@%\$ about that issue." Or, "According to the course, you're supposed to just accept it when I do that."



The Steps Ahead:

● Plan your strategy

Tell your partner what you're doing.

Tell your partner what your goal is.

Tell your partner that you are sure to stumble, err, and fail from time to time. But, you plan to persist.

● Alone or Together?

Explain that it is your new hobby, and you're willing to do it alone.

Offer to share it with your partner, if your partner wishes. Explain about each of you doing it alone ... at the same time.

● Is the relationship worth remodeling?

Don't even start if you aren't convinced that your partner is worth all the effort you'll put in. If the relationship is already dead, and you're planning your exit, take our other program on starting a new relationship. You'll learn some of the same valuable skills, but in the context of building a relationship with someone who is "right" for you.

● Is the relationship hot or cold?

If the relationship is full of anger and the fights are explosive, move swiftly, because that kind of relationship is on a short time table.

If the relationship has grown cold, and there is a lot of withdrawal and withholding, you've got more time. The good thing about a cold relationship is that a little new warmth is immediately obvious and you can see your progress more clearly.

- **Identify ongoing irresolvable issues ... and refuse to fight.**

You must immediately identify the ongoing irresolvable issues. If there is an issue that keeps coming up — and you don't know whether it's irresolvable — just assume it is.

Resolve immediately to stop fighting, arguing, or even discussing any of the irresolvable issues, unless you can do it with love and humor. If you feel one of those issues rising up, walk away and use the four questions to resolve your feelings about it.

If your partner begins a discussion of an irresolvable issue, requesting that *you* change in some way, explain that you've come to realize that that issue may not be resolvable, but you'll consider it further and get back to your partner later. Duck. Dodge. Defer. Deflect. Use any or all of these techniques perfected by bureaucrats and politicians to keep from having to discuss issues that are irresolvable.

- **Practice accepting, forgiving, or deflecting.**

Even on 'issues' that may be resolvable, practice accepting or forgiving rather than embarking on 'issue' discussions. Promise yourself that once the relationship has been remodeled, and you're plum full of love for one another, you might try an 'issue' discussion again. Know that when that time comes, you'll start the discussion from a positive start, and steer it to a positive and perhaps successful conclusion.

- **Practice appreciating your partner's appreciables.**

You'll learn to increase the power and frequency of the appreciation you give your partner. You'll learn to make a long list of those things you appreciate, and practice communicating that appreciation powerfully.

- **Give instead of withholding**

If you've been withdrawing or withholding, you'll have to give that up. That strategy never works, and only results in a cold dead relationship that will probably end in divorce anyway. So, commit to yourself to start giving instead of withholding. And, move closer instead of withdrawing. You'll learn the skills that will make this easier for you.

The Instructional Steps Ahead

First, as we discussed, you'll learn the incredibly important coping skills in "Four Questions and a Map." That will enable you to cope with any of the challenges you face in your remodeling job.

- **Learn "Positivity" so you can see the good in everything.**

Remember, your goal is 5 positive communications with your partner for every 1 negative. To do this, you'll learn the simple change you can make to your thinking that will make it easy for you to become more positive. As you practice this skill, you'll become so positive that your partner may hardly recognize you. Instead of 5 to 1, while

you're practicing, you might aim for 10 to 1. As odd as it may seem, the effect of positivity diminishes when you go past 12 to 1, so aiming for 10 to 1 is a safe goal.

- **Learn "Optimism" so you can see a good future.**

You'll learn the magic of optimism so you can be wonderfully hopeful for the future of your relationship. This will also help you greatly if you've been a worrier. Optimism isn't always as realistic as pessimism, but it feels so much better, and you're so much nicer to be around, that you'll gladly give up a little realism for the benefits of optimism. The change is easier than you think. It's just one little question that you learn to ask yourself every time you start to feel pessimistic.

- **Learn "Appreciating Someone."**

The one who should be appreciated is you. You're the one who is doing all the work while you both get the benefit. But, you're the one who is doing the work, and part of the work is appreciating your partner. With any luck, your partner may even give you a tiny bit of appreciation back (but, don't count on it).

- **Practice "Gratitude" for the good things.**

Another happiness skill that's beneficial to your relationship is being grateful for everything your partner adds to your life. This is slightly different from the appreciating skill, because it is something you do by yourself, and for yourself. The practices will help you focus on all the good things in your partner, and your entire life. Being grateful will make you happier. It's said that counting your blessings multiplies them.

- **Share with others in the Forum.**

One of the wonderful benefits of this package is that it comes with access to others who are doing the same remodeling that you're doing. If you ever get stuck, or have difficulty with any aspect of the course, just post your thoughts on the Forum and somebody will help you out.

Once you've mastered a skill, you can help somebody else out who might be struggling with something you've already mastered. It feels good to help someone else.

- **Read what others say as they struggle with the same issues.**

You'll find it reinforcing and beneficial to read the Forum posts to see how other people are striving or struggling with the same issues you are. Help where you can. Allow the questions to reinforce what you've learned. If you're not supposed to be having these discussions with your partner, you'll find it cures your feelings of loneliness to discuss the issues with others on the Forum.

- **Tell your story on the “Sad Story” Forum, to put it behind you.**

If you have a really sad relationship story, or even a whole life story, we offer the Sad Story Forum for you to write it down anonymously. This is a very therapeutic thing to do. As you write it, resolve that you will never tell the story again.

If you really have a sad story: as long as you carry it around with you, and think about it, and retell it, you are the victim of the story again. The purpose of the Sad Story Forum is for you to tell the story one final time. Your goal will be to leave it there, and leave it behind you. When you find yourself thinking about it in the future, just remind yourself that you have decided not to be a victim of your sad story any more, and you will let time and neglect gradually erode the story until it bothers you no more.

Also, when you’re practicing to be grateful, take some time to read the anonymous sad stories of others. It’s not really a competition to see who has the saddest story, but it will help you be grateful for how much better a life you’ve had than those other sad people.

- **Add what you can to be positive in supporting others.**

Do your best to be positive as you support the efforts of others who are remodeling their relationships. This will help you practice your positivity, and the other person doing the work will be happy to get a pat on the back. Maybe, if you’re really helpful and supportive, you might earn a little appreciation yourself.

- **Share your successes when something good happens.**

This is really important benefit of this package and the Forum. When you find your efforts succeeding in any little way, post your success — no matter how big or how small — to the “Success Story” part of the Forum. Three things happen, and all of them are good.

First, you are ‘marking’ the good feelings you get from your success in remodeling your relationship. This is wonderful for you. A little good feeling can grow into a much bigger good feeling when you share it with others..

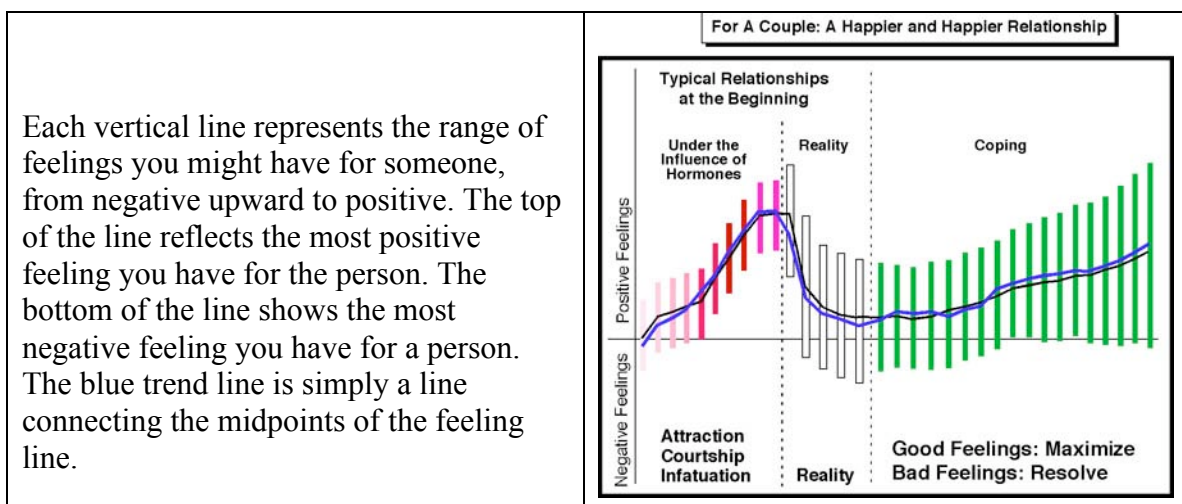
The *second* good thing is that others on the Forum are encouraged by your success, and it increases their determination to persist until they, too are successful.

The *third* good thing is that we will put the “Success Stories” Forum on our website for visitors to view. (Anonymously, if you choose.) They will be encouraged by your success and the successes of others to remodel their own relationship.

Kinds of Relationships

All relationships start out with some combination of attraction, courtship, and maybe infatuation. Then reality sets in. After that, couples must learn to cope. The key to whether the relationship will be loving and satisfying over the long term, lies in the *coping* patterns of how feelings are handled.

The one following is what we call a “Happier and Happier Relationship,” which could be considered ideal.



Coping Patterns

Each of the following relationship diagrams contains a different coping pattern, with a different pattern for handling feelings. We’ll only show the coping part of the chart, indicating how the couple handles good feelings and bad feelings. There are specific ways each of these may be handled.

Good Feelings

- Maximize good feelings
- Take good feelings for granted
- Discount good feelings

Bad Feelings

- Resolve bad feelings
- Take bad feelings for granted
- Maximize bad feelings

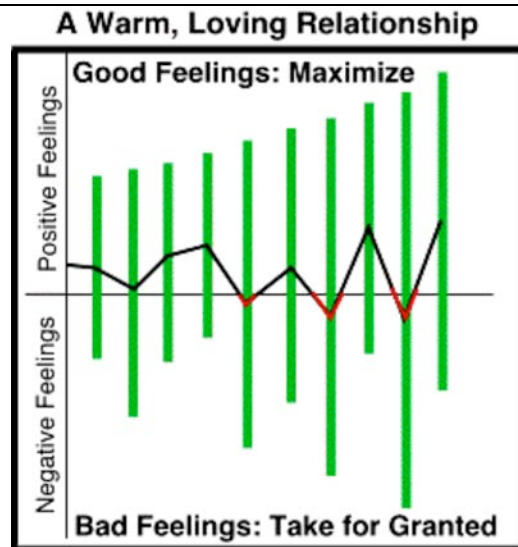
In the previous diagram — a “Happier and Happier Relationship,” — notice that all of the chosen actions were maximizing good feelings and resolving bad feelings. This is what it takes to create and maintain a magnificent relationship. In the next two diagrams notice that the good feelings are maximized, but bad feelings are either taken for granted or maximized, producing differing kinds of relationships.

As you look through the remaining diagrams, notice the effects of other patterns. Some will result in long-term relationships; some will result in divorce or alienation.

In the following diagram of a “Warm, Loving Relationship,” the individual is maximizing good feelings and resolving bad feelings.

A Warm, Loving Relationship

In this warm, loving relationship, good feelings are maximized through marking and affirming. The individual builds a reservoir of warm, loving feelings. Bad feelings are mostly taken for granted, allowing time to moderate, but there is no effort to resolve them. There are some negative periods (indicated in red), but largely the effect is positive.



A Mixed Feeling Relationship

In this relationship there is volatility as both good and bad feelings are maximized. They mark — pay attention to and remember — both the negative and positive feelings. The result is a relationship with moderated, mixed, overall feelings.



Taking Feelings for Granted

In the next three diagrams, good feelings are taken for granted, however, bad feelings may be resolved, taken for granted, or maximized.

A Long-term, Satisfying Relationship

In this kind of relationship, the individual actively works at resolving bad feelings, but mostly takes good feelings for granted, making no effort to mark them (notice or remember), or loop on them (replay in the mind).

A Long-term, Satisfying Relationship



A Typical, Normal Relationship

The typical, normal relationship may take both the good and bad feelings for granted. The most recent feelings will predominate, whatever they are. However, there is a gradual, downward trend on the overall perception of the relationship. This is due to the human tendency to give more weight to bad feelings than to good feelings.

A Typical, Normal Relationship



A Deteriorating Relationship

In a deteriorating relationship, good feelings are taken for granted and bad feelings are actively maximized. People harbor, nurse, and loop on (replay) the bad feelings, which results in a relationship that becomes gradually more and more negative.

A Deteriorating Relationship



Discounting Good Feelings

In the next three examples, good feelings are discounted, and bad feelings are resolved, taken for granted, or maximized.

A Non-feeling Relationship

People in non-feelings relationships will discount and ignore good feelings, but still try to resolve bad ones.

A Non-feeling Relationship



A Deteriorating, Negative Relationship

This is an example of a deteriorating, negative relationship, where good feelings are discounted, and bad feelings are taken for granted.

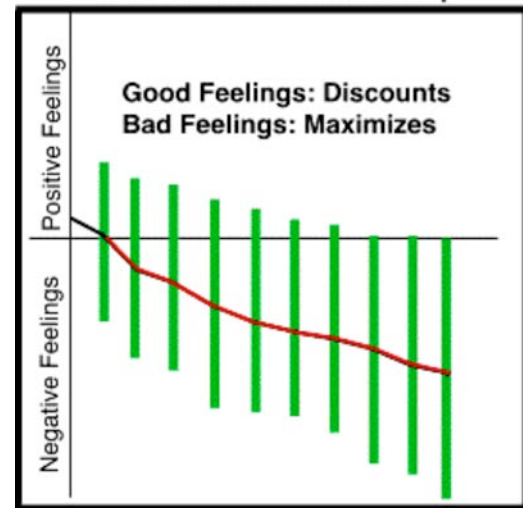
A Deteriorating, Negative Relationship



A Miserable Relationship

A miserable relationship is created when good feelings are discounted, and bad feelings are maximized. As you can see from the diagram, the relationship is heading steadily downhill, probably ending in some kind of termination.

A Miserable Relationship



As relationships change over time, and people choose to “work on them,” the relationship may move from one of the examples, to another. That’s good, if the coping skills are improving, not so good if they deteriorate. You can see how important the skill of dealing with feelings is, in terms of the long-term viability of the relationship.

Practice for Kinds of Relationships

Practice

- A. Review the charts from the text you just read. Select the one that is the closest to your existing relationship, based on the coping mechanisms for good and bad feelings. _____
- B. From that chart, write down what coping mechanisms are being employed.

- C. Using the checklist that follows, make notes about how you are handling the feelings. Write down the mechanisms you use. (see the next page)
- D. Write down three recent experiences where you took for granted or discounted good feelings.
 - 1. Review the good situation, and re-experience in a way that helps you feel good.
 - 2. Keep building this list. Come back to each daily to create a reservoir. Look for any small thing that you can feel good about, and treasure it. Mark it. Appreciate it. Tell you partner you appreciate it.
 - 3. Since your partner may have been experiencing the same negativity about the relationship that you feel, start adding five positive interactions each day, for every one negative interaction.
- E. Write down three recent experiences where you maximized bad feelings.
 - 1. Make notes about what you can do about the experience. Will you ask your partner for something, or accept it, or forgive it?
 - 2. Make notes about a plan to discuss it with your partner.
- F. If you're trying to create the ideal "Happier and Happier Relationship," continue the same process above, moving toward maximizing good feelings and resolve bad ones.

The Coping mechanism I've been Using

How have I handled my feelings (i.e. what do I do), when I experience the following:

Good Feelings

Maximize them _____

Take them for granted _____

Discount them _____

Bad Feelings

Maximize them _____

Take them for granted _____

Resolve them _____

Three recent experiences where I took for granted or discounted good feelings:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Three recent experiences where I maximized or took for granted bad feelings:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Four Questions Four Choices (Coping Quick Start Version)

This Quick Start Version of Coping is brought to you because some readers who have taken the full audio-visual version (“Four Questions and a Map”) have said, “We don’t need to understand how the mind works to cope effectively. We don’t need to understand how we are creating and distorting the thoughts that are making us hurt. All we need is to learn and practice the four questions and four choices. They are where all the value is. They work great, and we don’t even have to think about how the mind works.”

So, they suggest that we downplay the Map. That is what we are going to do in this Quick Start Version. If you find this is too big a leap of faith for you, or if you’re curious why this coping skill is so powerful, you can quit this Quick Start text and watch the audio-visual version, or read the whole story at HowToBeHappier.com.

We’ll start with a list of important beliefs that you need to use the short course. During the complete course, you’ll learn each one individually and understand them completely. If you can just accept them without fully understanding why they are true, go ahead and use this Quick Start Version: “Four Questions Four Choices.”

The Sage Model

The “Sage Model” is the name of the ‘Map’ from the audio-visual program “Four Questions and a Map.” You won’t learn much about the Map here, but it teaches and illustrates three important concepts. If you agree with these three concepts, then you will find it easier to cope with issues, difficulties, and any kind of bad feelings.

• You create your own feelings

First of all, it shows that you create your own feelings — good or bad. Most people think that people or events cause their feelings, but they don’t! Feelings are created inside the mind by the way you process and interpret inputs from people and events in your life.

You may have little control over the people or those events, but you can have almost total control over the way you experience and interpret them.

• You choose your own strategies

Some of the strategies you currently choose, get you what you want, but others don’t. “Four Questions Four Choices,” shows you how to choose a productive strategy.

• You create your own internal conflict and tension

The most common inner conflict is between the parts of your personality. Different parts want different things. If they don't get their needs met, they can fight and argue — right inside your head. It's called "self-talk:" talk, talk, and more talk. One of your parts may need to work, for example, while another part needs to be with your partner. The parts can fight each other, or undermine each other, or manipulate each other, until you — the whole you — feels really stressed out and isn't happy no matter what you do. The win-win resolution of those inner parts conflicts is handled by your Sage part — your wisest part — so you can have some peace of mind.

Accepting the Concepts

If you can accept these concepts:

You create your own feelings.

You choose your own strategies

You create your own internal conflict and tension.

... without fully understanding *why* they are true, then you're ready to learn to cope with issues, difficulties, and any kind of bad feelings.

The goal of the coping process is to relieve you from strong negative emotions by using your question processing mechanism. This switch takes you from being run by strong emotions to using rationality.

Here are the four questions that you ask yourself anytime you are thinking about something that hurts or feels bad.

1. What's Happening?

The answer to this question simply makes you aware that you are creating some sort of bad feeling.

2. How am I creating this bad feeling?

To answer this question, you need to know how your mind works, and learn the vocabulary of the Sage Model. You're going to skip this question because you're not learning the Sage Model. Don't be concerned that you're missing something important. You won't need to understand it, as long as you accept the idea that you: create your own feelings, choose your own strategies, and create your own inner tension, you don't need to know how that's happening.

3. Is this (the feeling I'm creating) what I want for my life?

Some bad feelings are normal, healthy, and natural. For example, your dog dies. You want to feel the loss. You'll want to grieve. You'll want to cope with the loss, but you don't want to extinguish authentic human feelings.

Most of the time your answer to that question will be "no." For example, "No. The anger I'm feeling at the moment at my partner is not what I want for my life."

The magic and power of this question keeps you regularly in touch with your life goals and what kind of life you want for yourself. It also makes sure that the choices you make are in support of reaching your life's goals.

4. How can I move toward what I want in my life?

This question prompts you to look at the four wise choices and choose the one that will best move you toward what you want for your life. If you limit your choices to just these four, you can be assured of making a wise choice.

(There are probably a million other things you could do in response to your bad feeling, but many of them would be unwise, and would not take you closer to your life's goals.)

The four wise choices are Act, Ask, Accept, and Forgive

Let's start with the first choice.

Act

You will choose to ACT when action is useful, productive, and will take you closer to your goals. For example, if you have bad feelings about an interaction you have with your partner — and we know because you're reading this that one of your life's goals is to have a great relationship — then you might choose to apologize for your part in the transaction that went wrong. In other words, take ACTION.

Ask

You will choose to ASK when discussion or negotiation will have a good chance to bring you closer to what you want in your life. If you and your partner have productive 'issue' discussions, which begin in a good place and end in a good place, and are often productive, you'll choose to ASK frequently.

If, however, you and your partner have not yet mastered productive 'issue' discussions, you might ASK less often.

Accept

You will choose ACCEPT when acting and asking wouldn't give you a good outcome. Your partner has opinions or actions that may drive you nuts, but your differences are irresolvable, so ACCEPT that that's the way your partner is — especially when you

consider this a tiny failing in the context of all the great things you appreciate about your partner. Accepting what you can't change is wise.

Forgive

If you find something you can't accept, then FORGIVE. Forgiveness is wise, and lots of forgiveness is very useful in making a relationship harmonious.

That's really all there is to coping wisely: Four Questions, Four Choices.



Quick Start Practice for Coping

First Day Practice Preparation

Make a list of every thing that your partner does, says, or thinks that you don't like — things that you use to create your bad feelings.

Daily Practice

Pick one item from the list you made, and ask the four questions.

Then make the wisest of the four choices:

1. If *Action* is wisest, schedule when you will take the chosen action.
2. If *Asking* is wisest, schedule when you will ask, discuss, or negotiate regarding the 'issue.'
3. If *Accepting* is wisest, mark your decision to accept it by writing it down, saying it out loud to yourself (or some other way that will be memorable for you). Then, the next time the issue arises, you'll remember that you've chosen to accept that particular thing in your partner.
4. If *Forgiving* is wisest, mark your decision to forgive by writing it down, saying it out loud to yourself (or some other way you will remember). Then, when the issue comes to your mind, you'll have an immediate memory that you've chosen to forgive someone (maybe even yourself). Allow yourself to feel good about your forgiving nature and appreciate how powerful your forgiveness will be in achieving what you want for your life.

You're done when

You'll know you're done when you've handled every item on your list, and you automatically remind yourself immediately — when a bad feeling arises — of your decision to accept or forgive. If you've taken action, or asked, those should be resolved. Until this becomes automatic and instantaneous, you'll still be loaded down with bad feelings about your partner that haven't yet been successfully resolved.



Being Positive

Positivity is the ratio of positive to negative thoughts or statements. Think for a moment about someone you know who is extremely positive. No matter what's happening this person almost always has something positive to say. Now, think about someone you know who is truly negative. You seldom hear positive comments, and frequently hear complaints, gripes, sarcasm, cynicism, or critical statements.

The first person has a high positivity ratio. The second person has a low positivity ratio.

Raising your positivity ratio will make you happier. And, everyone around you who is positive will be happier as well. Negativity can bring other people down, and invites them to be negative too.

By raising your positivity ratio, you'll be happier in many ways. First, you'll be happier yourself. Next, you'll make the people around you happier. And, no matter how grumpy you may be, you're always going to be happier when those around you are happier. Your family (kids, parents, siblings, etc.) will be happier when you are more positive. Your co-workers will be happier when you're happier, and so will your friends.

Many scientific studies have been done, and they confirm the same thing. If you can *keep your own positivity ratio at five to one, or better*, you'll be a truly positive person, and so will more of those around you.

In work situations, it has been proven that managers who are positive while relating to their employees — on a ratio of at least five to one — will have happier employees, less turnover, more productivity, and more loyal employees.

In marriages, it has been studied with incredible care. In the book called “The Mathematics of Marriage,” the leading marriage expert Dr. John Gottman shows that marriages that last are those where the partners each have positivity ratios higher than five to one, while interacting with their partner.

If you have a low positivity ratio, you will be less happy. Your relationships will have gone sour, your kids will be difficult, you probably won't get to manage people, and if you do, they won't be happy. Even your friends won't be that happy with you.

Is there any limit to positivity? Can there be too much positivity?

Yes, the benefits of being positive start to reverse when your ratio goes above about thirteen to one. That's Pollyanna territory. If you're *always* positive, and *never* critical, assertive, or distrustful — even when it is called for — you lose much of what you gained by being positive.

If you have a low positivity ratio, you probably don't have to worry about becoming too positive. If you want to learn to lift your positivity ratio, we've got some useful practice that will enable you to turn things around and become much more positive. It won't happen overnight, and it will challenge you, but if you do a little tiny bit everyday, you can turn your ratio around and start heading higher in a very short time. Every day that you persist, and every day that you practice the five-minute practice, your ratio will creep ever so slightly higher. You'll discover an amazing change in yourself.

It has been estimated that each of us has more than 200,000 thoughts each day. That's 200,000 negative thoughts if you're a truly negative person. That's painful. If you can turn that around, you'll eventually be getting maybe 170,000 or more of those thoughts to be positive. That's becoming happier!

You don't leap from grump to Pollyanna. You creep, day-by-day, ever so slightly higher, until pretty soon people start to notice a change in you. You'll become happier, your relationship partner will be happier, and so will everyone you deal with. In six months, or maybe even a year, just doing five minutes a day of positivity practice will totally reverse your positivity ratio. And, you will be happier.

Getting to a five to one positivity ratio if you've been a negative, critical person, may be difficult for you, and for a while, you won't feel natural and like you're really being you. Yet, it is the most powerful change you can make in yourself and your life. And, the practice only takes a few minutes a day to do, and it is really easy to do. So, if you are committed, and have the ability to persist, you can become a positive person.

Example

A negative person and a positive person are watching a TV drama. The negative person is constantly noticing "what's wrong or bad" with the characters and the lines in the TV show. The positive person is looking to see "what's good or right" with the characters and lines in the TV show.

The positive person finds the good, even if a critic might find the show to be dreadful. The negative person finds every flaw, blemish, mistake, or weakness in the show. The positive person enjoys the show. The negative person might enjoy it, but mostly enjoys finding the flaws. If the negative person insists on commenting on every flaw, it's difficult for the positive person to continue enjoying the show. And, unless the positive person is mentally tough, the constant carping can make the positive person turn negative about the show.

Another Example

Here is one person's idea for creating more positivity.

"I used to pick up my son and two of his friends from school each day. On the trip home it seemed as if all I ever heard were complaints. When I got tired of that I decided to do something about it. I told them if they wanted to continue their diatribes, they could do that, but each of them would first have to start the trip with three things that had gone well. Some days the positive comments were pretty thin, such as "Well, at least I didn't fall down during gym class." However, the trip got better over time and certainly was much more enjoyable for me, and, I believe for them as well. Years later I discovered how powerful that exercise was when I heard my son say to his son, "Tell me three things that went well before you complain about things that didn't."

Here is one formula for turning negative thinking into positive. Anytime you're aware that you're having a negative thought, reaction, or feeling about something, ask yourself, "What's good about this?" before you go outside of yourself and express negativity..

Then, when you have found even one thing to like about what's happening, express yourself positively. Maybe at first you just smile or nod. Gradually, you might work yourself up to commenting; "I like this...." about what ever it is you found that was good.

The Comparator

You have a place in your mind that we call the Comparator. The Comparator's job is to take any input that comes into your mind and evaluate it to see what it is, and what it means to you. That means that every thought you have is evaluated as the Comparator takes it and looks through your storehouse of past experiences to see how to interpret it.

Now, here's the key. The Comparator may be looking for sameness or differences. It might be looking for what's good about it, or what's bad about it. It might be looking for what's right about it or wrong about it. It might be looking for what you like, or what you don't like about it.

It's not your fault that your Comparator may be looking for differences or negatives instead of similarities or positives. Some people are genetically disposed to look for differences and negatives. Others are genetically disposed to look for similarities and positives. If you find the genetic explanation hard to believe, then you can believe the

alternate theory that our Comparators are set by following the examples of one or both of our parents, or other role models in our lives.

The bad news is that the Comparator tends to operate by habit, and if it's set to look for negative stuff, it will habitually find it. The good news is the Comparator is only one place in your mind, and if you want to change it, it is simple to reprogram. Yes, it is simple, but overcoming a long entrenched habit is never quick, so it takes some persistence.

Feel free to change the question your Comparator asks anytime you get a negative thought. Any one in the following list will work. If you get tired of one, pick another and begin asking that.

"What's good about this?" is one way to evaluate your experiences in life. Or you could ask, "What about this fits with ...

- what I think?
- what I believe?
- what I've learned?
- what I've experienced?
- what makes me laugh?
- what makes me emotional?
- with my goals in life?
- with my dreams in life?"

The single most important part of this building this habit is that anytime you get a bad feeling, stop, and begin searching for something about it that is positive. When you find some kind of match, express yourself in some positive way.

Facial positives:

- A smile
- A laugh

Positive Gestures:

- A "thumbs up"
- A "high five"
- A "fist pump"
- A nod

Positive assertions:

- "Yes!"
- "I like..."
- "That's good."

Remember, the goal is five positive expressions for every one negative expression. If you have been a truly negative person, you're going to turn those 200,000 thoughts a day that used to be negative into 370,000 thoughts a day, as you automatically counter at least 170,000 of those thoughts with something positive.

Obviously, you don't need to express yourself positively 170,000 times a day. But, as you find those positive counter thoughts, express at least five of them for every one negative expression you allow yourself.

Some Thoughts

Here are a few clichés, or homilies that you can tell yourself as you gradually begin evolving away from negativity toward positivity:

If you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything.

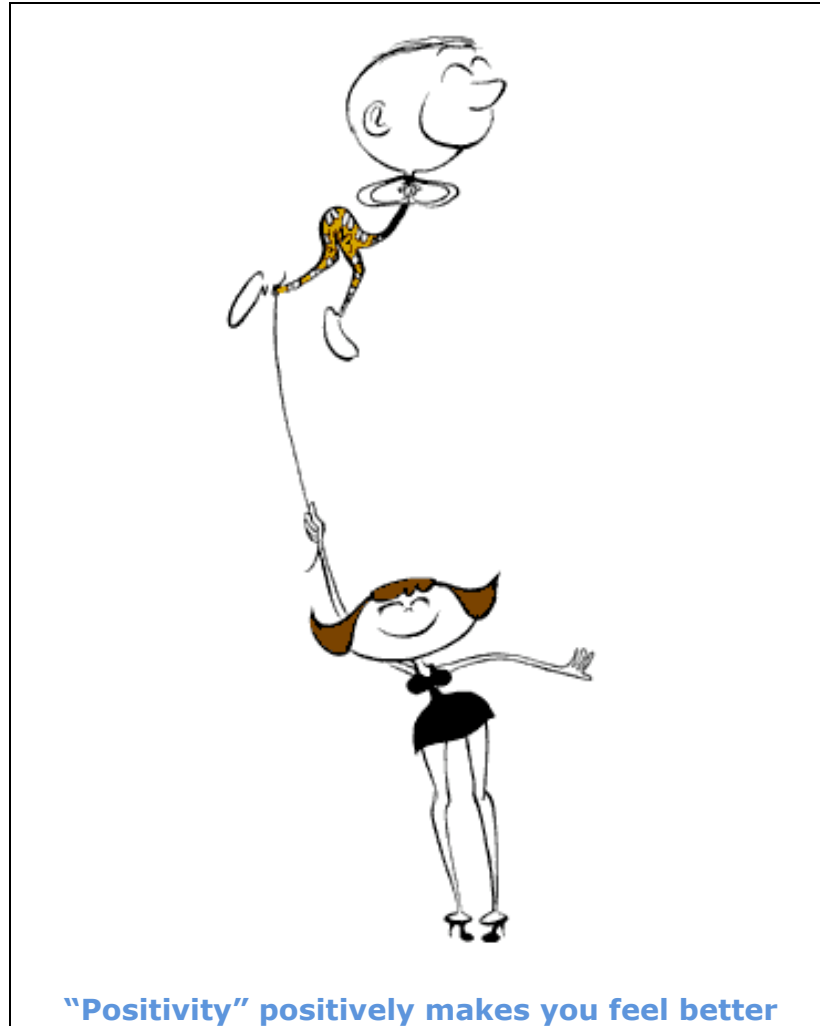
What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity. They are but trifles, to be sure, but, scattered along life's pathway, the good they do is inconceivable.

It is said that laughter is the best medicine. It is an excellent medicine.

The most completely lost of all days is that on which one has not laughed.

Some people see things as they are and say "Why?" I dream things that never were and say "Why not?"

Note: If you liked the idea of having a Comparator, you may want to read Book Two in the "Metamating Series," to see how it fits into the entire map of the mind (The Sage Model).



Quick Start Practice for “Being Positive”

First try this quick start version of the practice. If it doesn't work for you, move to the more formal practice. Here's the minimum you need to know about positivity.

Quick Start Practice

- Learn to recognize a negative thought. If you don't recognize it immediately when you have it, you may have to spend a few minutes each morning examining your memory of the past twenty-four hours for examples of negative thoughts you had. When you recall a negative thought, counter it with a positive thought, and mark the positive thought by saying it out loud, or writing it down. You're learning to mark the positive thoughts (increase the emotional response).

- As soon as you've learned to recognize a negative or critical thought — right when you get it — reprocess the thought and ask yourself for an opposite thought that is positive.

Example: “This soup is too salty.” You stop and ask yourself, “What is there about the soup that is good?” You might get the answer, “It's got plenty of chicken in it.”

Example: “Her dress is a bit tight.” You stop and ask yourself, “Is there anything about it that you like?” You might get the answer, “It's a great color for her.”

- Now, at that moment, you have two thoughts about something. A negative thought and a positive thought. You only say, use, or remark on the positive thought. You've become a more positive person.
- When you find yourself countering almost every negative thought with a positive thought, and it is happening automatically, you've become more positive. Your life will begin changing, and the people around you will begin changing as well.

That's it. You practice it consciously for a few minutes every day, and eventually it will become automatic. When you meet someone who might be a prospect for a relationship, make every effort to use a high ratio of positive comments to negative ones. If your prospect is very negative, your positivity may be a turn off. That's good, because you want to be with a person who thinks it's great to be positive.

If you've practiced positivity until it has become a habit, go on to learn to be optimistic. You'll discover there are some similarities. Optimism is little more than having positive thoughts about the future. You've already mastered having positive thoughts. You're half way to being more optimistic.

If you found the Quick Start practice for being positive too informal for you, and you'd like a more formal, disciplined practice, with more guidance, we've prepared another set of practices for you, on the next page



Keep the ratio at least to 5 positive for every negative.

Formal Practice for Being Positive

Estimated time to build this habit: 30 days to 6 months

Goal:

Write a goal statement, e.g. "My goal is to increase positive things I say or do and decrease negative comments, judgments, and assertions, until I have a ratio of five positive for every negative." OR "My goal is to become aware of more positive things and shut up about negative things." OR "My goal is to keep my negative expressions to the barest minimum and find good things to say or express, until my ratio is five positive to one negative."

My goal is: _____

Practice:

Daily:

- A. Remember at least three examples of being negative about something or someone in the last 24 hours. Do your best to remember what you said or did to express a negative thought.

Negative thoughts:

1.
2.
3.

For each negative expression, consciously ask your comparator for a positive thought about the same person, situation, or thing. Write down the positive thought. This is a way of marking it, and making it have a higher emotional impact for you than simply saying it.

Positive replacement thoughts:

1.

2.

3.

Your goal is to begin (and it may take some time, so be patient) to recognize negative thoughts as you are having them. You then ask yourself for a positive thought about the same person, situation or thing. When you do this, if it is appropriate, mark the positive thought by expressing it verbally, or at least in body language and gestures.

- B. When you find you can write down three examples of when you had a negative thought, asked for a positive thought, and expressed it, you can start to raise the bar for yourself.

The next time you come to your log (see next page), see if you can recall four, then five, and so on.

When you get to six or more in a day, you don't need to write them down, it's enough to just recall each of them and congratulate yourself for each one. (We don't want you to take more than 5 minutes out of your day.)

Daily Log

Date	Three Things

You're done when

... you find yourself automatically reversing a negative thought by thinking a positive one, and expressing yourself positively as a result. When this is a habit, appreciate yourself and go on to build another skill. Until then, continue the practice.



Being Optimistic

Being optimistic will make you happier. Optimists live longer, happier, and healthier lives than pessimists. Dr. Martin Seligman, in his book “Learned Optimism,” points to research that proves that optimists live longer, healthier, and happier lives than pessimists. His book also proves his contention that optimism *can be learned*. Using Dr. Seligman’s findings, we can teach you how to be more optimistic.

If you have a low happiness level, odds are good that you tend to be a pessimist. Pessimism is a way of maintaining a low happiness level, or an *unhappiness* level.

Some people are pessimistic in various aspects of their lives. For example, someone may be optimistic when at work, but pessimistic within a relationship. Some other people are more broadly pessimistic. For them, it is difficult to view the future positively in any domain of their lives.

According to the research, every successful relationship must have at least one, and preferably two people who are optimistic. If you are a confirmed pessimist, you’ll probably think that there isn’t much chance that this will really work for you. And, of course, if we were pessimistic, we’d think you might be right. We, however, are optimists. So, we believe you can do it. You can do it if you want to do it.

There are three simple keys to changing your thinking. We’ll teach them to you, and give you a short, fast practice you can do regularly to get you in the habit of optimistic thinking.

Optimism and pessimism are both *habits*. They are habitual patterns of thought. Old habits are not easy to break, but new habits are easy to acquire. We find it helpful not to try to break the pessimism habit, but to build a strong habit of optimism and carry them both forward to use the one that is most appropriate.

How will you know which habit is the most appropriate? Optimists tend to be less realistic than pessimists. Pessimists tend to be more realistic than optimists.

Optimists think anything is possible, and pessimists are more realistic. So, if you convert to optimism, you have to know when to shift back. For example, if you are inspecting parachutes, it pays to use your pessimistic habits of thinking. If you are planning a space launch, it pays to use your pessimism to imagine every possible thing that could go wrong, so you can prepare for it.

If you’re really a confirmed pessimistic, you already knew that optimists aren’t as realistic as pessimists. So, if you decide to convert, you’ll find it useful to reduce your

total commitment to reality, and also know when it's prudent to use the realistic side of your pessimistic realism.

If you're already a confirmed optimist, you don't need this section, although you're welcome to explore if you're curious. We've found that even very optimistic people can learn to be even more optimistic. (You can also learn when it is risky to be overly optimistic.)

If you are a confirmed pessimist — and really want to be happier — please do the practice. If you are sometimes pessimistic and sometimes optimistic, we suggest you learn how to become more optimistic, when it's appropriate.

Pessimism vs. Optimism

Here is the idea: Any time you think of the future, your pessimistic habit of thinking creates a negative scenario. You may even find that you dread thinking about the future because it is so daunting.

To counter the pessimistic habit of thinking, you will learn to “loop” on your thoughts, and use the optimist's formula to create a counter to the negative thoughts.

Pessimistic thoughts tend to have three biases or exaggerations:

1. Me: “It's *my* fault she left.” (focus on self)
2. Always: “I'll *never* find someone else.” (exaggerates time)
3. Everything: “My *whole life* is ruined.” (excessive scope)

Optimistic thought tends to have three (possibly unrealistic) biases.

1. (Not Me) “It wasn't my fault. I was a good partner.”
2. (Not Always) “I'll have a new relationship in no time.”
3. (Not Everything) “I've still got my job, my friends, my hobbies, my family.”

The examples above are about an event that happened in the past. She left him.

Optimism and Pessimism mostly relate to possible *future* events.

Pessimism is an unrealistic negative view of the future.

Bring up almost any subject to a pessimist, and ask what the person sees in the future. “Tell me what you think about the economy?”

I fear the worst. I think it's worse than they say. It scares me. (It will hurt ME.)
When it collapses, it won't recover in my lifetime. (It will last forever.)
It'll ruin everything, for everybody. (It will be pervasive ... all aspects of life.)

Optimism is an unrealistic positive view of the future.

Ask an optimist about the economy:

It's getting better and better all the time. I see the Dow at 20,000. (Everybody wins.)
We may have a dip or two, but they'll be short lived. (Problems won't be for long.)
I'll have a comfortable retirement. (One aspect)

Actually, none of us can really know. We're all guessing about the future. But, we all think about the future. So, why not take the most positive view?

If you have worries, you'll discover those worries stem from pessimistic visions of the unknowable future. Worries hurt you. The only known benefit of worry is that it might prompt you to plan in advance for adversities that may never happen.

The wise approach, especially if you're looking for a life partner who is optimistic, is to err on the positive side and be optimistic.

So, here is the optimist's mantra:

Bad things won't happen to me. Maybe to others, but not me. If something bad does happen, it'll be over quickly. And, it'll only affect one aspect of my life. I've got so much more.

Looping

The pessimistic negative thoughts will follow the pessimistic formula:

Something bad will happen "TO ME" in the future.
It will last a long time, maybe for the rest of my life.
It will affect my whole life.

So, if you hear that someone had a heart attack, you might think:

I might have a heart attack.
It may kill me, or at least affect me for a long time.
My life will be ruined. Some lousy life. I'll be bedridden.

By the way, if you are a confirmed pessimist, you may be right to worry about health problems. Statistics show that optimists live on average about eight years longer than pessimists. Part of the reason for that is the constant negative view of the future creates stress and worry, which is hard on the body.

Do you wonder that optimists live longer? They worry far less. Everything will be fine.

Once you realize that you've had a negative thought *about the future*, you'll practice instantly looping back through your mind again, and using the optimist's formula:

Bad things probably *won't* happen to me. They are more likely to happen to others.
If I did have a problem, I'd quickly get it fixed, and I'd be fine.
Nothing can stop me from enjoying my life, my friends, my family, etc.

If you've been somewhat pessimistic, you might have doubts about your ability to change your thoughts. You have lived with negative thoughts *about the future* so long they seem normal to you. You're right that it's hard to change your thoughts. So, we don't suggest you even try. You're simply going to add a new, overly-positive set of thoughts that you will use to counter the normal, natural negative thoughts that your genes, hormones and parenting probably set you up to have. We say "overly positive" thoughts because that is the way they'll seem to you at first.

If you're confident that you can do what we recommend, then jump over the suggested readings and go right to the practice.

Helpful Readings

If you are somewhat doubtful that you can do what we recommend you may want to read Book Two of the Metamating Series entitled, "Coping: 30 Ways to Change your Self-talk." It will walk you through the Sage Map and show you step by step how thoughts are created, processed, and assessed. Then, when you get to the practice, you'll be able to visualize exactly how you're going to use your mind to become more optimistic.

The "Metamating Series" book two download is at the Forums in HowToBeHappier (<http://www.howtobehappier.com/portal/forums>).

Quick Start Practices for Being Optimistic

Practice:

Here is the outline for your initial practice and for all of the 5-minute practices:

1. Make a list of everything you ever worry about happening in the future. Don't strain to make it too complete; you can always add to it later.
2. Everyday, pick one item from your worry list, and use the optimist's mantra.
Bad things probably won't happen. (Not Me)
If it does, it'll be over quickly. (It's fixable)
There is so much more to my life than that item. (Not pervasive)
3. You'll quickly discover that you have to restate the words differently for each possible adversity you might worry about. No problem, just adjust the words until you make them work for you.

What you're waiting for is for your mind to start using the mantra automatically, whenever you have a pessimistic thought. When that happens, you have two completely different predictions in your mind regarding the same issue. Choose to believe the positive one. Choose to talk only about the positive one.

You're done when your mind is automatically converting pessimistic thoughts into optimistic thoughts and you affirm to yourself that you choose to believe the optimistic ones.

If you find the Quick Start practice is too informal and unstructured for you, use the formal practice. Here you'll be guided a little more through the optimistic practices.



Formal Practice for Being Optimistic

**Estimated time to build this habit: 90 days to 12 months
(depending on how pessimistic you normally are).**

Goal:

Write down on a scale of 1-5 how optimistic you are (1 is hardly ever, 3 is sometimes, and 5 is almost always). _____

Write a goal statement, e.g. "I will practice being optimistic until I am comfortable that I can do it habitually."

My goal: _____

One-time Practice:

A. Start with the list of things to think about in the chart that follows.

B. Take one item at a time.

- Write down your immediate thoughts about it.
- Create an optimistic assessment based on:

Bad things most likely won't happen to me; they tend to happen to others.

If anything does go wrong, I'll handle it, and get on with my life.

I've got a rich, full life; I could lose any single aspect of it and still thrive.

- Choose to take the optimistic view.

Item and Immediate Thoughts	Optimistic View
Global warming:	
Future taxes:	
Social Security:	
Mad Cow disease:	
Next political party to win:	
Middle East peace:	
Future of Iraq:	
US/European relations:	
Future of the middle class:	

Daily Practice:

- A. Create your own list of things that you worry about for the future

Take one item per day from your list; imagine a positive and optimistic outcome and choose to think that that will happen.

My Worry List	An Optimistic Assessment

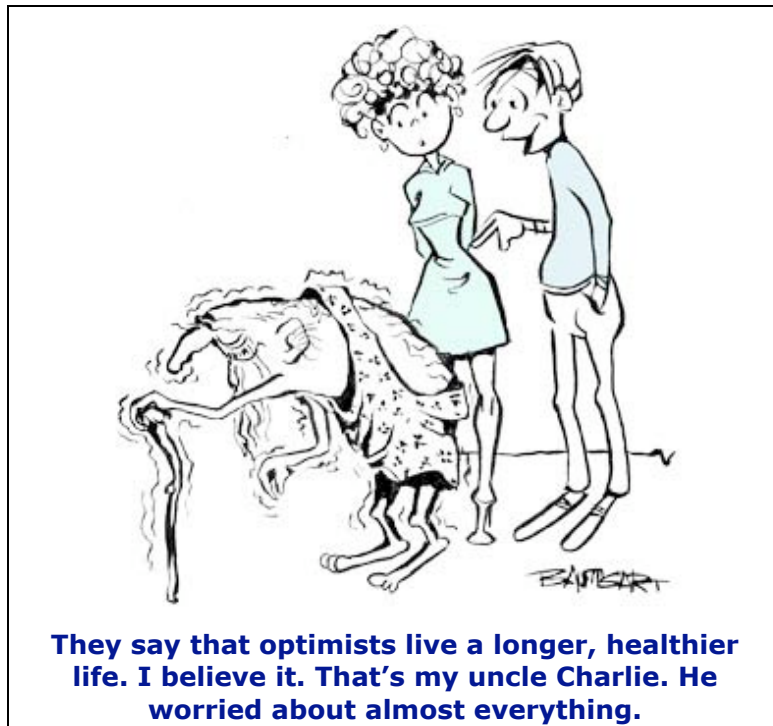
- B. Write one example from the past 24 hours where you found yourself immediately countering a pessimistic thought about the future with an optimistic view. Confirm that you prefer now to think about that issue more positively.

Pessimistic Thought that was Countered

- C. Review your goal.
- D. Continue practicing for at least 90 days.
- E. Share your successes and/or difficulties on the Forum.

You're done when

... you are confident that at least half the time you automatically counter any pessimistic thoughts about the future with another more optimistic thought



Appreciating Someone

One thing you can totally control is the frequency and quality of the appreciation you give to others. There is nothing to stop you from appreciating everyone in your life as often as you think about it. (We'll help you think about it.)

Expressing your appreciation often — especially if it's the highest quality appreciation — will bring the people in your life closer to you. And (not by accident), the more appreciation you give, the more appreciation you are likely to get back.

If you haven't thought about the frequency or quality of your appreciation, you may find you've been giving your appreciation in meager doses, like, "Nice haircut." You could be giving much stronger appreciation, like, "You're always so cheerful. Thanks for being my partner."

Giving frequent, high quality doses of appreciation will make you happier. It will also make the people in your life happier. So, when you find that person who might someday become your life partner, you can make your partner feel happier and appreciated. You also increase the odds that you'll get some appreciation too. (But, don't count on it. That's not why you're doing it.)

If you decide to become happier by giving more frequent, high quality portions of appreciation, we've got a lot to offer. It's easy, fast, and rewarding.

Appreciating someone is the act of communicating to someone how important they (or something they've done), are to you.

You may call appreciation many things:

- respect
- esteem
- treasure
- regard (you may regard the person, or an act)

You may:

- appreciate
- acknowledge
- attach importance to
- be grateful for
- be thankful for

As you can see, appreciating someone is a huge category of things. If you're more comfortable calling it "respecting someone" or "acknowledging someone," feel free. The idea is simple. Someone does *something* you value (an act), or is *someone* you value (the person).

Appreciating someone is the *act* of *communicating* your appreciation to that person. We say, “act” because it involves an action, not just a thought. We say “communicating” because that implies the person “hears” the message.

The communication can be in person, by phone, by Instant Message, by email, by note, by card, or delivered through another person. The act of appreciating someone will make you happier. It will also, most likely, make the other person happier as well.

This step is all about becoming more aware of the people in your life whom you appreciate, and the acts of others whom you appreciate. Once you are aware of the people and the acts, this step is about increasing the frequency with which you actively communicate your appreciation. In addition to more awareness and frequency, this step is also about making your expressions of appreciation more powerful.

Before we begin the practice, let’s be clear on what makes an expression of appreciation powerful or wimpy.

An example:

You’ve got your arms full of stuff, and as you approach the door a stranger stops and holds the door for you. How do you express your appreciation?

- You smile and nod. (wimpy)
- You say, “Thank you.” (fairly minimal)
- You say, “I appreciate your holding the door.” (appreciating the act)
- You say, “You’re very kind; thank you.” (appreciating the person)
- You say, “Thank you! You’re very thoughtful. I really appreciate your help.” (You’ve appreciated both the act and the person, and said it was meaningful to you.)
- You say, “Wow! Thanks! You’ve saved my life. Come to dinner Sunday.” (You’ve gone too far. That’s over the top.)

Another example:

Your partner cooked dinner and you liked it.

- You smile, and give a thumbs up. (better than nothing but fairly wimpy).
- You smile and say, “I like what you did.” (appreciating the act)
- You smile and say, “Good dinner. You always make things taste great.” (appreciating the act — more powerful because you made it pervasive with the word “always.”)
- You smile and say, “Good dinner. I can always count on you to create a great meal.” (appreciating the act, and also appreciating the person)

- Big grin as you say, “Great dinner. I can always count on you to create a great meal. I always look forward to your cooking. You’re really good at figuring out delicious ways to keep us both trim.” (appreciating the act, the person, saying why the person is meaningful to you as well as meaningful to you both)
- Big smile as you say, “Great dinner. I can always count on you to create a great meal. My boss was telling me I looked really trim, and I told her you were the reason for it.” (Appreciating the act, the person, and sharing your appreciation with the person, and third parties as well.)

Okay, you’ve got the idea.

1. *Appreciate the single act*: nice, but wimpy.
2. *Appreciate the act more broadly* (“always”): stronger but not personal
3. *Appreciate the act, and the person*: much stronger
4. *Appreciate the act, and the person more broadly* (“always”): very strong.
5. *Appreciate the act broadly, the person broadly, and why it’s meaningful to you*: fantastic; really strong; powerful.

How to Communicate the Appreciation

These are rough guidelines; feel free to ignore. These tend to be weak to strong, top to bottom.

An email message

An instant message

A handwritten note

A phone call

A personal letter

Face to face verbal.

If you communicate a very powerful appreciation, any medium will work. If it’s really powerful, sometimes it’s better to have it in writing so the person can look at it again and again. (I’ve seen really good ones framed.)

Escalate your appreciation gently. Don’t leap from one who only nods to one who is effusive in your thanks overnight. The suddenness of the shift will be uncomfortable for some people, and it probably will be uncomfortable for you as well.

Increase your appreciation power at a moderate pace. There isn’t any hurry. You’re building a habit that will last your lifetime.

APPRECIATING SOMEONE

If you've been pretty lax in appreciating the people in your lives, start with appreciating their acts. When you're both comfortable with that level, shift to appreciating the person, when you both comfortable with that level, start explaining what they mean to you.

Frequency and power are both important. It's important to ramp up both frequency and power.

You may find it difficult to imagine how much happier this change in you will make you. You're also likely to find yourself getting more appreciation as well. A happier you makes all the people in your life happier.

The Quick Start and Formal practices for "Appreciating Someone" have been combined.



Combined Quick Start and Formal Practices for Appreciating Someone

Estimated time to build this habit: 60 to 180 days.

Goal:

Write a goal statement, e.g. “I will practice expressing stronger and more frequent appreciation to the people who are important to me until I am comfortable that I can do it habitually.”

My goal: _____

Getting ready for the Practice

- A. Make a list of people who are important to you in some way. (Family, friends, co-workers, sub-ordinates, life partners, etc.) See next page.
- B. Decide how you want to communicate that appreciation to each one (what medium you will use).

Daily Practice:

- Pick one person.
- Draft the strongest message of appreciation you feel comfortable with.
- Decide how and when that day you will deliver it.
- Deliver it.
- Write down any reactions you got in the last 24 hours from prior appreciations you’ve given.
- Note your feelings about the reaction you got. Did it make you happier?
- Continue with the next person on the list, until you have completed your list. Feel free to add to the list as you go along.
- Start back at the top and do it again. This time a little stronger.

Review your goal.

My feelings							
Reaction							
How I will communicate							
People important in my life							

You're Done When

... you've gone through the list several times, and you are confident that you've built an enduring habit of gradually escalating appreciation for the people who are important to you in your life. Pay special attention to appreciating your partner.

Ridiculously Simple Secrets to Great Relationships

You've come a long way. You've learned how relationships can be re-modeled. You've studied and practiced positivity, optimism, and appreciating others. What follows is a bit of a recap of those things you've already read about and some new things you may not have learned yet.. Even if you've read "ridiculously Simple Secrets," before, you may notice that you now see these ideas in a new light.

Attraction

Most relationships begin with attraction. One person is attracted to another. Attraction doesn't need to be mutual. It's a nice bonus when it is. Couples in which neither party found the other attractive upon first meeting have still been able to achieve great relationships. What makes one person attractive to another is unique to each individual. What and whom you will find attractive is imprinted on your brain at a very early age, and reason plays no part.

Attraction is almost useless after a couple advances into a relationship. Some experts suggest that attractiveness is a negative factor, because of the higher incidence of outsiders "hitting on" an especially attractive man or woman who is married. If an especially attractive person ties his or her self-worth to being attractive, it can cause that person difficulty as age diminishes attractiveness.

Ridiculously Simple Secrets

Don't limit your search for a life partner to people who are especially attractive.

Don't think you won't find a life partner because *you* don't think you're attractive. You *will* match the imprinting for somebody who finds you uniquely attractive. You won't understand why and neither will your partner, but it's still very real.

If you keep finding yourself attracted to individuals who are wrong for you in every other way, ignore the attraction and run swiftly the other way.

If you find a great person, and that person isn't attracted to you, it doesn't mean any future great relationship is doomed. Just skip attraction and go on to courting.

Attraction isn't love. Don't marry too soon after meeting. Attraction will fade. Love will grow.

Courting

Most relationships advance by the use of courting behaviors. One party or both express their interest in, or attraction to, the other by using age appropriate courting behaviors. In teen-agers, these may include teasing, bumping, touching, being attentive and often around.

In adults, courting rituals may include flirting, frequent phone calls, dating, flowers, gifts, dancing, and other outward demonstrations of interest, attraction and affection. Once the relationship is confirmed by marriage or living together, the courting behaviors and rituals gradually (or quickly) fade away.

Ridiculously Simple Secrets

Don't think your partner's love has faded because courting behaviors have faded away.

Romance, moonlight, special music, are part of courting. They aren't love either. They merely advance the relationship toward love.

Don't judge a potential partner based on his or her courting behaviors. Courting only serves to advance a relationship; it is quickly left behind.

Infatuation

If you are lucky, you may experience infatuation on your way to a bonded relationship. Infatuation is a temporary state of madness in which your partner can do no wrong, has no faults, and is perfect in virtually every way. Infatuation is the stuff that poems and songs are written about. Infatuation feels so good, and so "right" that it is very easy to make really unwise decisions. During infatuation, nothing else matters very much. School, goals, dreams, family, friends and work all fade in importance relative to your partner.

Infatuation is not love. Infatuation isn't necessary to achieving a great relationship. It's fun, magical, exhausting, and very temporary. It will fade away. It will soon be gone and gone forever. You can't get it back. You can't have it again with that person. It feels so good that a few people become addicted and change partners frequently so they become "serial infatuators." Again, infatuation is not love.

Ridiculously Simple Secrets

You can have a wonderful, loving, lifelong relationship without ever experiencing infatuation. So, don't think you settled for the wrong partner just because you never felt infatuated.

If you're in a bonded relationship, and find yourself feeling infatuated with somebody else, run like the wind. Don't turn around and don't look back. Infatuation is a form of madness and will make you act crazy. If you give in to it, it will soon leave you, and you'll find you've been a perfect fool.

If you already have a relationship, even if it isn't magical at the moment, infatuation with somebody else is your enemy, not your friend. It is your downfall, not your way out. You can take that to the bank. If your relationship is bad, fix it. If you can't fix it, move on, but deal with your relationship first, and resolve it totally before you give in to attraction or infatuation with someone else.

Reality

Reality is what comes right after infatuation. Reality is where the madness of infatuation fades away and you once again have access to your senses. You see your partner in a new light. Compared to your view during infatuation, the new light is glaring and less pleasant. Many people go into denial of reality because they prefer the distorted wonders of infatuation. But, gradually, even denial can't protect you from the realities of your partner.

Reality is the source of "cold feet" and "second thoughts" that often occur just prior to marriage. To successfully survive reality, the relationship requires that one or both of the partners have "coping" skills. When neither have the skills, the relationship will likely be short lived, with marriage or not.

Ridiculously Simple Secrets

Your partner is not who you thought he/she was when you were in the throes of infatuation.

Your partner is just a normal human being, with the normal number of human flaws and idiosyncrasies.

When reality hits, you're wrong to think that love is gone, or your partner has changed. All that has happened is the madness has faded away.

Bonding

Bonding refers to the bonds forged by shared experiences. All that may be left from the courting and infatuation phases are the memories of the shared experiences. The strength of forged bonds depends on the strength of the emotions felt during the experience. Infatuation is valuable in that it arouses enormously strong emotions, so the couple share many experiences made extraordinary by being shared while feeling powerful emotions. It is these bonds that — forged during all phases of the relationship process — make up the initial quantity of “Love” felt by the couple. Finally, we have *real* love. And, for the rest of the relationship, that love can be enhanced and will grow through sharing experiences, while feeling positive emotions together. Or, it can be diminished and eroded by sharing negative experiences while feeling emotional pain and hurt.

The bonds of shared positive experiences are the basis of real, adult, mature love. Remembering and replaying the positive bonding moments again and again throughout the duration of the relationship will strengthen those positive bonds, and result in a stronger feeling of love. Love will grow, because each replay of the loving experience adds another bond, and the total grows.

Ridiculously Simple Secrets

Attraction can feel like love, but isn't. Infatuation can feel like love but, because it always goes away, it can't be love. Courting, dating, flowers, songs, and romance can feel like love because they are forging positive bonds of shared experiences during moments of powerful emotion, but romance is not love.

Love is the sum of all of the positive shared experiences, heightened by powerful emotions. When the relationship is confirmed — by marriage or living committed to one another — the couple has a pool of love which they will increase, or diminish by their future actions.

Issues

As the relationship proceeds, “issues” will arise. Issues are points of difference between the partners that create bad feelings for one or both of the partners. The partners easily deal with most issues. He puts the toilet seat down because it upsets her to fall in when she backs in, in the dark. She stops hanging her lingerie on the shower curtain rod because it gets in the way when he showers. These are the normal, natural, changes people make when the change doesn’t affect deeply held opinions, self-visions, goals, or life decisions. (In other words, the cost of change is low.)

A second set of issues always arises. These issues are not easily resolved, and in fact, may well be irresolvable. To over simply somewhat, the way the partners deal with the irresolvable issues may determine the long-term fate of the relationship.

Irresolvable Issues

Irresolvable issues typically stem from ‘life decisions’ or ‘self-images’ that causes the partners to be or behave in ways that conflict with each other. Several examples may help clarify the kinds of issues that are irresolvable.

The class/no class example

Both partners grew up poor, in trailer parks in the South. Her mother taught her that poverty was a burden that could be handled with dignity. Their trailer was always neat as a pin, and the yard was immaculate. In her early teens she vowed that she would handle life with “dignity and class,” regardless of what her life brought.

He grew up proud to be a “redneck.” He aspired to a truck, a dog, a wife, lots of kids, and a ‘working man’s’ job that would give him time to fish and hunt on the weekends. He held the “suits” in disdain, and he ridiculed anybody that acted like a “yuppy,” or wasn’t a loyal American “working man.”

He and she married, had a few kids, and ran smack into their primary irresolvable issue. She wanted nice things for the house, a neat yard and garden, good manners for the kids, and a mini-van. These were things that she equated with having ‘class’ and living with dignity. These things were important to her because they stemmed from a life decision about who she was and who she always would be.

He thought she was trying to “put on the dog” and “live above her station.” What she wanted conflicted directly with his life decision to be who he was and live the way he thought was ‘right.’ Their individual life decisions were at stake. What made the issue irresolvable was that neither was going to change. The ‘cost’ of change was too great.

The spend/save example

She grew up in a family that always lived on ‘the edge.’ They lived paycheck to paycheck, and always ended up with more bills than money. Her father spent money on

liquor and poker, and the family suffered. She decided that her life would be different. She would always spend less than she earned, and save diligently for retirement, college for the kids, and a “rainy day.” She vowed never, ever, would she have to deal with bill collectors in her life.

He grew up in a family with a father who was the opposite of hers. His father pinched every penny until it squeaked. The toys, fancy sneakers, and gadgets that his friends had were “unnecessary extravagances,” according to his father, so he had none of them. He couldn’t wait to leave home, earn his own living, and get whatever he wanted and needed, without having to explain or defend his purchases to his father.

When the couple fell in love and married, they both had good educations, good jobs, and earned good incomes. Their irresolvable issue had to do with his spending. He spent more than they earned between them, and ran up big debts with mortgages and fancy cars. She wanted to spend less than they earned and save for the future. They were in constant conflict over the money issue, and it was irresolvable because of their conflicting life decisions. Neither would change, and neither wanted to change.

Some issues are irresolvable

Even if you and your partner can’t imagine that you will have irresolvable issues, you will. Some won’t show up until events occur, like having a child. Issues around the child can seldom be anticipated, but there will likely be some, e.g. how to discipline, etc.

Or, some may occur with the incapacity of a parent. One may feel like they have to take a sick mother to live with them, the other may not.

Ridiculously Simple Secrets

Identify the irresolvable conflict issues that are, or will be in your relationship. Make a go/no-go decision on that issue before marriage, if possible. If you marry in spite of being aware of the issue, then cope with it and don’t waste your breath arguing or fighting about it. In other words, NEVER FIGHT OVER AN IRRESOLVABLE ISSUE.

The duration of your relationship will depend largely on how well your partnership can resolve or accept your differences over issues, whether changeable or irresolvable. So, if you can’t learn to fight successfully, DON’T FIGHT AT ALL!

Coping

Coping is the process of dealing immediately with bad feelings (so they don’t fester and grow), and deciding whether the issue can be resolved with action, or resolved with

negotiation, or whether it must be accepted and/or forgiven. If you learn to cope successfully, you will have bad feeling episodes less often, for a shorter duration, and they erode your collection of loving feelings less.

Shifting from strong negative emotions immediately into a questioning mode, where you engage your mind with questions, will allow you to cope successfully with issues, rather than allowing emotions to rule.

Effective coping will enable you to have fewer, shorter, and milder episodes of bad feelings about your partner.

Ridiculously Simple Secret

Protect your collection of loving feelings about your partner by quickly coping with and resolving any episodes of bad feelings.

Marking

Marking is a process whereby you remember a positive experience shared with your partner, recall it vividly, re-experience the good feelings you had at that time, and engage as many of your senses as possible in marking your memory. You mark it by reminding your partner about it, or telling someone about it, or if alone, just laugh, and smile, and tell yourself about it.

Ridiculously Simple Secret

Figure out a way to keep those happy memories alive.

Marking takes a loving shared experience and makes it larger, or stronger. Marking reinforces the bond, and increases feelings of love for your partner.

A Truly Magnificent Relationship

You can create a truly magnificent relationship by resolving all bad feeling episodes as quickly as possible, and marking all present and past good feeling episodes as strongly as you can. By making a habit of coping and marking, you maximize the benefits of shared good experiences and minimize the damage of shared bad experiences.

The net effect is to enable the bonds of love to grow over time and get stronger and stronger.

Ridiculously Simple Secret

Have as many positive shared experiences with your partner as possible before you marry or commit to live together. The bonds formed by those good, shared experiences build the bonds of love that will give you something to build on, and protect you from the hazards of reality.

(Everything to this point is covered in excruciating detail in my six e-books in the Metamating Series. Everything from here forward is digested from the extensive research done by the absolutely best expert on Marriage, Dr. John Gottman and his colleagues at the Gottman Institute in Seattle. Dr. Gottman can predict with astounding accuracy how long a marriage will last and whether and when it might end in divorce.)

With apologies to Dr. Gottman, and with the deepest respect for his many books and endless research, I will attempt to make his extensive findings ridiculously simple.

Positivity

Positivity refers to the ratio of positive to negative messages one partner gives the other. The messages can be verbal or physical. Messages can be given by gestures, attending or just listening. Successful marriages, with a very low risk of divorce, maintain a positivity ratio of at least 5 to 1. Negative messages are so damaging that it takes 5 positive messages to repair the damage; seriously negative messages will require even more.

Ridiculously Simple Secret

Give your partner at least 5 times as many positive messages as negative.
(Assuming the messages are at the same weight)

Start and End “Issue” Discussions Positively

Couples with high positivity should find it easy to start ‘issue’ discussions respectfully and with a positive tone. Discussions that start positively have a much better chance of actually achieving a good result. Whether the discussion achieved a successful result or not, it is important that the discussion also end on a positive note.

Couples would be wise to avoid “issue” discussions about issues that are irresolvable. Irresolvable issues are best treated with humor and acceptance, rather than ‘discussions.’

Ridiculously Simple Secret

If you’re determined to have an ‘issue’ discussion, start and end it on a positive note.

Marriages

Half of All of Them End in Divorce

Divorce is an enormous penalty to pay for marital mistakes. Divorce affects far more people than just the two in the relationship. Families, children, neighbors, friends and co-workers are all affected negatively when a marriage breaks up. Sick marriages can be revived. The skills that it takes to make a great marriage can be easily learned and made into habits.

Marriages in Decline

Relationships decline when there is low positivity, and when ‘issue’ discussions start poorly and get worse.

If one or both of the parties are volatile and explosive, issue discussions turn quickly into fights. Fights turn quickly into hurtful, exaggerated, insulting, and degrading affairs that create a very negative, powerfully emotional, shared experience.

One partner or both can make the damage worse by replaying the experience over again in memory. In the same way that it is valuable to “mark” good, loving experiences to build loving bonds, it is damaging to ‘mark’ bad, hateful experiences by reliving and remembering them.

Ridiculously Simple Secrets

If your ‘issue’ discussions are hurtful and unproductive, don’t have them.
(Duh)

If you have a really negative emotionally charged shared experience, resolve the bad feelings as quickly as you regain access to reason. Coping effectively can minimize the damage and slow the decline.

If you’ve been in a fight, and expressed damaging messages, get busy as quick as you can to give enough positive messages to repair the damage.

According to Dr. Gottman, volatile couples who fight explosively with damaging and hurtful messages and strong negative emotions are on track to divorce within 3 to 5 years ... or maybe in the first year.

Marriages that are “Cold” Last Longer But Still End up in Divorce

Sometimes one or both parties will attempt to get back at their partner for negative messages or hurtful ‘issue’ discussions, by withdrawal or withholding. One way to stay out of fights is just not to talk to your partner. Another way to fight without seeming to fight is to simply withhold affection, services, attention, or sexual participation.

Withdrawal and withholding will protect against damaging fights, but they are both negative and defeat the positivity required to make the relationship nourishing and rewarding.

This kind of marriage is most likely to divorce around 12 to 16 years.

Ridiculously Simple Secrets

DON’T FIGHT means more than just avoiding loud and hurtful discussions. It means wisely accepting the differences between you and your partner. Acceptance and forgiveness are the wisest way to cope with ‘issues’ that won’t be resolved by action or negotiation.

If your fights are explosive, emotional and hurtful, you’d better hurry and change things around. You don’t have much time.

If you become aware that you are in a partnership where there is a lot of withdrawal and withholding, you’ve got more time, but you’re still headed for disaster.

How do You Turn a Sick Relationship Around?

Turning a sick relationship around is easy to describe and hard to do. It involves four steps and enormous commitment and persistence.

- Step 1. It may be useful to tell your partner that you recognize you have problems, and you are going to take some steps with hopes of making the relationship better. Tell your partner that you are doing this out of love, and hopes for a better future. Ask your partner to recognize that you will make mistakes and stumble and fall from time to time, but you intend to persist and make the relationship work. It is valuable to free your partner from any blame and take all the responsibility onto yourself.
- Step 2. Begin immediately to practice being positive. Give your partner at least 5 and maybe 8 positive messages for every negative message.

- Step 3. Identify all of the irresolvable issues between you, and practice handling those issues with acceptance, forgiveness, and humor. If your partner demands changes from you, on an irresolvable issue, treat your partner respectfully, decline to discuss it because you are convinced it is irresolvable, and up the positivity and humor level to show an effort to make amends.
- Step 4. Mentally commit to start the relationship over. Remember the love with which you two started out. Mark the bonding experiences that once held you close. Cope wisely with any negative feelings that arise because you are doing all the work. You can restore the relationship to a healthy, loving state — if your partner is willing — with high positivity, few if any negative ‘issue’ discussions, and by marking and helping your partner re-experience the positive experiences with which you bonded.

Conclusions

- It must seem easier to let a sick relationship slip away to divorce than to turn it around by yourself. That may be why 50% of all marriages end in divorce.
- Divorce is a lousy experience and a terrible answer. Divorce doesn’t teach you the skills you need to make a relationship work (coping, marking, positivity, and identifying irresolvable issues). As a result, you’re not likely to make your next relationship work either. (The divorce statistics for second marriages are even worse than for first marriages.)
- Everything you need to learn, and everything you need to practice has been brought together for you, in one place, along with the experts who can help you if you get stuck. You also have access to a bunch of other people (in the Forum) who are mastering the same skills along with you and understand what you are going through ... and the gift you are giving your partner. (Click here to learn more. Happier Relationships (<http://www.happierrelationships.com>))
- If you learn these skills, and practice them, and your partner still is steering your relationship toward divorce, you will be incredibly well equipped to make your next relationship succeed.

Summary of All of the Ridiculously Simple Secrets

Don't limit your search for a life partner to people who are especially attractive.

Don't think you won't find a life partner because *you* don't think you're attractive. You *will* match the imprinting for somebody who finds you uniquely attractive. You won't understand why and neither will your partner, but it's still very real.

If you keep finding yourself attracted to individuals who are wrong for you in every other way, ignore the attraction and run swiftly the other way.

If you find a great person, and that person isn't attracted to you, it doesn't mean any future great relationship is doomed. Just skip attraction and go on to courting.

Attraction isn't love. Don't marry too soon after meeting. Attraction will fade. Love will grow.

Don't think your partner's love has faded because courting behaviors have faded away.

Romance, moonlight, special music, are part of courting. They aren't love either. They merely advance the relationship toward love.

Don't judge a potential partner based on his or her courting behaviors. Courting only serves to advance a relationship; it is quickly left behind.

You can have a wonderful, loving, lifelong relationship without ever experiencing infatuation. So, don't think you settled for the wrong partner just because you never felt infatuated.

If you're in a bonded relationship, and find yourself feeling infatuated with somebody else, run like the wind. Don't turn around and don't look back. Infatuation is a form of madness and will make you act crazy. If you give in to it, it will soon leave you, and you'll find you've been a perfect fool.

Your partner is not who you thought he/she was when you were in the throes of infatuation.

Your partner is just a normal human being, with the normal number of human flaws and idiosyncrasies.

When reality hits, you're wrong to think that love is gone, or your partner has changed. All that has happened is the madness has faded away.

Attraction can feel like love, but isn't. Infatuation can feel like love but, because it always goes away, it can't be love. Courting, dating, flowers, songs, and romance can feel like love because they are forging positive bonds of shared experiences during moments of powerful emotion, but romance is not love.

Love is the sum of all of the positive shared experiences, heightened by powerful emotions. When the relationship is confirmed — by marriage or living committed to one another — the couple has a pool of love which they will increase, or diminish by their future actions.

Identify the irresolvable conflict issues that are, or will be in your relationship. Make a go/no-go decision on that issue before marriage, if possible. If you marry in spite of being aware of the issue, then cope with it and don't waste your breath arguing or fighting about it. In other words, NEVER FIGHT OVER AN UNRESOLVABLE ISSUE.

The duration of your relationship will depend largely on how well your partnership can resolve or accept your differences over issues, whether changeable or irresolvable. So, if you can't learn to fight successfully, DON'T FIGHT AT ALL!

Protect your collection of loving feelings about your partner by quickly coping with and resolving any episodes of bad feelings.

Figure out a way to keep those happy memories alive.

Have as many positive shared experiences with your partner as possible before you marry. The bonds formed by those good, shared experiences builds the bonds of love that will give you something to build on, and protect you from the hazards of reality.

Give your partner at least 5 times as many positive messages as negative.

If you're determined to have a heated discussion, start and end it on a positive note.

If your 'issue' discussions are hurtful and unproductive, don't have them. (Duh)

If you have a really negative emotionally charged shared experience, resolve the bad feelings as quickly as you regain access to reason. Coping effectively can minimize the damage and slow the decline.

If you've been in a fight, and expressed damaging messages, get busy as quick as you can to give enough positive messages to repair the damage.

DON'T FIGHT means more than just avoiding loud and hurtful discussions. It means wisely accepting the differences between you and your partner. Acceptance and forgiveness are the wisest way to cope with 'issues' that won't be resolved by action or negotiation.

If your fights are explosive, emotional and hurtful, you'd better hurry and change things around. You don't have much time.

If you become aware that you are in a partnership where there is a lot of withdrawal and withholding, you've got more time, but you're still headed for disaster.



Additional References

Six e-books: “The Metamating Series”

Audio-visual program: “Four Questions and a Map”

E-book and e-Workbook: “Four Questions and a Map”

E-book: How To Be Happier

The downloads for these are at the Forum for “Starting a Relationship”

Also available:

“Sagery: A User’s Manual for the Mind:” a three book series by Ken Johnston, for \$29 (because you’re a customer you get a customer discount).

Outside books of interest:

“Learned Optimism” by Martin Seligman

