

LESSONS FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION, DECREASING CONFLICT, AND GETTING CLOSER

by

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INTRODUCTION

WHY WHAT YOU DO MATTERS TO YOUR RELATIONSHIP (EVEN WHEN YOUR PARTNER DOESN'T DO ANYTHING)

DEAR FUTURE RELATIONSHIP EXPERT:

You are about to learn some powerful lessons for improving relationships. In this e-book I will guide you to becoming more proficient with six of the most important areas for your relationship success.

The methods that I teach people are based on a **Relational Model**. This model makes only one assumption--that your partner wants to have a relationship with you and that is why he or she is with you now. As long as that is true, you can change your partner's behavior by changing what you say and do. The way you respond to your partner's behaviors and the way you talk about change are particularly important. Doing these things effectively can make the difference between a lasting relationship and a failed one.

According to the Relational Model, it only takes one person to initiate the changes that improve a relationship. That means that *even if your partner is currently uncooperative*, your changes can result in improvement in the relationship. Of course, if you both make *positive actions*, that will improve your relationship more quickly and with less stress.

A “**positive action**” is an action which brings about a *positive result*. For an action to be a good action, it must be effective. It is not enough just to think that what you are doing is right. For example, if you believe the “right” thing to do is to patiently wait for your partner to change, but your partner is not changing, then your action of “patiently waiting” is not a positive action. Your “patience” actually contributes to the problem by prolonging it.

Coaching is based on the **Reality Principle**. Success is accomplished by taking specific actions. As long as we only think about taking actions, or as long as we try to achieve success by taking ineffective actions, we are not following the Reality Principle. You can tell you are not following the Reality Principle if you continuously feel frustrated.

Frustration is an emotional signal to find a more effective way. The easiest way to align yourself with the reality principle is to learn what works for others and do that instead of what you are currently doing. What works for others will work for you.

In my **coaching**, I help people to do three fundamental things required to improve their relationships—often from the brink of disaster. First, I help them to see reality, which is what is going on right now in their relationship. Secondly, I help them to stop all of their ineffective behaviors, the ones that waste their time, and keep them stuck. Thirdly, I help them to take positive actions, the ones that actually bring the results they desire. The

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result is they create positive change in their relationship, they feel empowered, and they feel freer to be themselves.

Some problems require the assistance of a professional. My special expertise is in creating **interventions** for severely damaged relationships. By the time a relationship is severely damaged, people have done all that they know how to do to make improvements and are becoming burned out. Without immediate help, the relationship will end. I help individuals or couples in such relationships to make positive changes using **non-rejecting, non-confrontational, positive methods**. If you are interested in such an approach, please visit my Relationship-Coach.org or GreatRelationshipCoach.org.

With the **six lessons in this e-book**, you will have the chance to learn some realities about communication and behaviors that promote a good relationship. They may differ from the way you communicate and behave. If so, consider whether your communication and behaviors are bringing you positive results. If they are not, I suggest you try what you learn here over a **three month** period. If you have the **characteristics** of a person who is able to make such changes, then you should see a significant improvement in your relationship.

ONE WORD OF CAUTION. If your relationship is already severely damaged, these lessons will not be enough to save your relationship. It would be like using a first aid kit to try to save someone who needs surgery. If your relationship is severely damaged, the sooner you get help, the easier it will be to rebuild your relationship. You can go to my website and register for a [consultation](#) or [coaching package](#) to start improving your relationship by the end of this week.

I wish you every blessing for your relationship.

Coach Jack

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LESSON 1: THE RELATIONAL MODEL IN ACTION

A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE: JOE AND HIS WIFE

TEST YOUR SKILLS AT COACHING WITH JOE AND HIS WIFE

Joe's relationship with his wife is becoming more and more distant. Neither of them knows what to do about it. As you read about Joe and his wife, first pretend you are the coach. Try to say aloud what you would advise either of them. After that, read Coach Jack's comments.

JOE'S CONCERNS

"JOE" has been having problems with his wife. She doesn't seem to care what he says and has taken to being more secretive. When he tries to talk to her, he just gets short answers. He wonders what she is thinking. He has told her many times what she needs to do to have a better relationship with him. He often complains about her way of talking to him, and reminds her of the best way to say things. He feels like he is trying very hard to teach her and help her, but he just feels unappreciated and shut out.

You be the coach: What would you say or do to help Joe? (Hint: Telling him to “Ditch the Witch” is not an acceptable answer!)

COACH JACK'S COMMENTS:

Joe has the right idea--relationships take work. And, the way his wife communicates with him is not good. But, his methods are ineffective and actually are a large part of the problem. Even though he may be 100% right, being right does nothing to attract his wife, or encourage her to change. Joe will need to give up correcting and reminding. Joe will be reluctant to do that, though, because he thinks that means giving up on the relationship. What Joe doesn't see is that when he gives up correcting and reminding, his wife will increase her desire to communicate with him. He also needs to learn how to listen, and express himself in a way that brings them closer.

Now, let's suppose that Joe's wife (she didn't give you her name) is the one who has asked for your coaching help . . .

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JOE'S WIFE'S CONCERNS

"JOE'S WIFE" has been having problems with her husband. When they first married, he was patient and kind. But recently, he has become more and more critical. And, she is becoming more and more reluctant to talk to him about anything. It seems that Joe is more interested in fixing her than in having a relationship with her. So, she keeps more and more to herself, and finds herself hoping that he will just leave her alone. She used to love Joe very much, but she doesn't love the way he has become.

You be the coach: What advice would you have for Joe's Wife? (Hint: Telling her to "Dump the Bum" is not an acceptable answer!)

COACH JACK'S COMMENTS:

Joe's Wife wants to have a good relationship as much, or more than Joe does. She has no desire to keep secrets from him, but has no wish to be criticized either. She can't understand why her husband has changed the way he has. She sees Joe's behavior as attacks against her and as attempts to "fix" her. What she doesn't see is that Joe is trying to create a better relationship with her, and that his desire for a better relationship is actually fueling his behavior. Joe's methods *are* harmful, but his desire for a better relationship is the same as hers. Joe's Wife is in the position to put a stop to Joe's criticism and to help him get what he really wants--sharing, communication, and a better relationship. To do that, Joe's Wife needs to learn some important boundary skills for shutting down the criticism. She also needs to learn how to structure her communication with Joe in a way that will help them both get what they want (better communication and a better relationship). Creating win-win communication will mean that they both feel closer, because that is what they both want.

SUMMARY:

- Both Joe and his wife are interested in improving the relationship.
- They are both stuck in a pattern of blame
- Either of them can take responsibility for creating positive change.
- Evaluating whether their current methods are positive (create positive outcomes) is their first step toward change.
- Joe needs to recognize that while his motivations are good, his methods are not effective.
- Joe's Wife needs to realize that while shutting down communication protects her from some criticism; it also contributes to their poor communication.
- They can learn what works for others, and could also benefit from the help of a relationship coach.
- Joe's Wife needs to look at the motivations behind Joe's behavior. Joe's attempts to communicate and fix things are driven by his desire for a better relationship; otherwise, he would just leave her alone.

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- Persisting in this pattern will eventually lead to Joe. giving up on the relationship. It will end his criticism, but also his desire to have a closer relationship.
- Joe can benefit from communicating acceptance, listening, and building trust.
- Joe's wife can benefit from communicating clear boundaries while learning to restructure the way she and her husband communicate.

This is one session's work for a relationship coach, but can result in major changes for a couple.

IMPLICATIONS FOR *YOUR* RELATIONSHIP:

- It is essential to communicate positively, even if you are trying to change your partner's negative behavior.
- Make sure your partner's *good* communications and behaviors are at least partially successful to encourage him or her to continue to communicate with you,
- Use good boundaries to make sure any bad communication from your partner is completely unsuccessful.
- Don't avoid your problems longer than it takes to emotionally catch your breath. Using avoidance is like bailing water out of a leaking ship. Eventually you will and your partner will tire of it and the ship will sink.
- Look for the motive that is driving your partner's behavior. Everything happens for a reason. And, your partner is still with you for a reason.
- You can improve your relationship, even if your partner is the cause of the problems.

It's always easier to look at someone else's situation than your own. What I especially hope you take away from today's lesson is that what men and women do relate to what the other person does--the Relational Model. Either partner can make changes to improve the relationship.

Can you see the connection between your partner's behavior and your own? Are you reacting to your partner's behavior while your partner is reacting to yours? Can you identify one change you could make to break the pattern and improve the communication?

LESSON 2: HOW TO IMPROVE THE WAY YOU AND YOUR PARTNER TALK

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAY, IT'S HOW YOU SAY IT THAT COUNTS

AS YOU COMPLETE THIS LESSON

you will become aware of some truths about communication. You will realize that you have the power not only to change what you say, but also to change what your partner says to you. Learning to use your new knowledge will cause your relationship to easily extend to a deeper and closer level.

NATURALLY EVERYONE WANTS TO HAVE BETTER COMMUNICATION with their partner. Before they begin coaching most clients have relied on

- *complaining,
- *nagging,
- *pleading,
- *reminding, and/or
- *waiting and hoping

AT SOME POINT (and maybe where you are now), they realized that these ways were not working. Although they felt sad at the time, it was the best realization they had for a long time. It was their time to learn how to be more effective.

WHEN YOU COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

YOU WILL GET	YOU WILL INCREASE
*respect, *love, *attention, and *cooperation.	*trust, *admiration, *attraction, and *desire

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JUST IMAGINE how much you would love and respect your partner if he or she made just a few small changes in the way he or she talked to you. The respect, love and attention that you get from your partner is also a result of the way you communicate with your partner. Words can heal and words can damage. Even small communication changes can build respect, love, attention, cooperation, trust, admiration, and attraction. If you have problems with any of these, communicating well will be an important part of the solution.

IF YOU WANT YOUR PARTNER TO COMMUNICATE BETTER, *YOU* MUST COMMUNICATE BETTER

Because your partner's love and respect are important to you, it is *first* essential to recognize any communication problems that you have. I am **not** talking about becoming a sweet, gentle, and passive person. But I do mean being clear, positive, and appropriate. You won't always say what your partner wants to hear, but you can say things in a positive and clear manner. The better you communicate, the better your partner will respond.

THREE RELATIONSHIP KILLING COMMUNICATIONS TO AVOID

Every time you communicate one of these messages you lose one (or more) trust points. When your trust score gets to zero, your partner won't want to talk to you at all.

1) **Negative Messages** (these cause emotional distance)

Examples:

"I wish you weren't ..."

"I don't like the way..."

"Can't you..."

2) **Unclear Messages** (these cause confusion and misunderstanding)

Examples:

"I want you to straighten up your act and be nice once in a while."

(What does "straighten up" mean? How often is "once in a while"?)

"I wish you would do something about our relationship."

("something"? like what?)

"The way that you talk to me reminds me of why we don't talk much."

(What way?)

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3) **Inappropriate Messages** (these cause frustration, hurt, and/or anger) and

Examples:

“Compared to my ex, you’re...”

“You’re such a bitch, loser, etc.”

“I don’t see the point in talking to you”

“It’s a waste of time talking to you”

PEOPLE WHO ARE FED UP OR BURNED OUT with their relationships are often unaware that they are pushing their partner away or creating disrespect. Observing the quality of your relationship and the way your partner responds to you will give you important clues as to whether you are communicating well. While your partner's behavior can have various causes, it is imperative to make sure your communication is not part of the problem.

YOUR MOST IMPORTANT FEATURE

The way you communicate, more than **any** other of your features, determines your success in getting jobs, in making friends, in making more money, in meeting and dating people, and in getting your partner's respect, admiration, and love.

MYTHS AND TRUTHS

You may need to unlearn some popular myths about changing others. Learning the following truths will help you create more love and intimacy in your relationship.

TRUTH ONE: UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE DO NOT CHANGE PEOPLE.

Unconditional love is a wonderful quality and is highly desired. It is very attractive. Unconditional love and acceptance, though, do not change a person's behavior from bad to good. For this reason, I never teach my clients to accept bad behavior. Accepting bad behavior will make you less respected, which is bad for your relationship.

TRUTH TWO: PEOPLE CONTINUE TO DO WHAT IS PARTIALLY EFFECTIVE, EVEN IF THE OVERALL RESULT IS BAD.

You can apply this rule to anything from cigarette smoking to underemployment, to spoiling children, to gambling, to communication in a bad relationship. Everything that a person continues to do has some benefit for that person. If you want to know why a person does something, look for the benefit for that person.

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**TRUTH THREE: WHEN SOMETHING IS COMPLETELY INEFFECTIVE
PEOPLE QUICKLY GIVE IT UP.**

The smoker who got NO physical or social satisfaction from smoking would soon quit. People who spoil their children would soon quit if they got NO positive response. People who could not survive with their current income would quickly look for better or more work. People who behave badly with their partner soon stop if their partner will NOT stand for it.

IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP:

It is essential to communicate well, which means that you are clear, positive, and appropriate, regardless of how your partner communicates. You cannot hold your partner to a standard of behavior that you don't hold for yourself. The way you communicate is the single greatest influence you have on your partner's desire to be with you.

LESSON 3: HOW TO GET YOUR PARTNER TO OPEN UP AND TALK TO YOU

INTIMACY REQUIRES TRUST, AND TRUST STARTS WITH SHARING

LEARNING AND IMPROVING

The more you learn, the more you will understand that improving your relationship is just a matter of knowing and taking the right steps. If your relationship is conflicted, it just means taking additional steps to remove the conflict before you work on being close.

You never need your partner's agreement or cooperation to do something that is loving and good for the both of you.

We cannot improve bad communication by doing more of it. People who have gotten to the point where they hardly talk anymore need to do more than to start talking again. Why? Because if they just start talking again they will recreate the same communication problems that led to their not talking in the first place!

TOXIC COMMUNICATION REMINDER:

The last lesson taught you three errors that you must avoid to keep from poisoning your relationship. If you are doing any of those three, you will need to keep working on them before moving on to today's communication building skill. You can't simultaneously poison your communication and build your relationship.

COMMUNICATING WITH AN UNCOOPERATIVE PARTNER:

Most people can greatly improve their communication by working on listening rather than working on talking. This is especially true if you have an uncooperative partner. The uncooperative partner will shut you down, tune you out, or scramble your words to mean something entirely different. He or she will not be focused on listening to you nor try to better understand what you are saying.

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THREE COMMUNICATION GOALS

Using positive communication skills, you will be working on three objectives:

1. Increasingly sharing deeper levels of communication ,
2. Increasing respect for yourself (our partners cannot love us if we don't have their respect), and
3. Building intimacy (a shared sense of closeness)

COMMUNICATION SKILL: USING CURIOSITY LISTENING

By being positively curious about what your partner is saying you will:

1. Show that what your partner says is important to you.
2. Focus on listening rather than on presenting your viewpoint
3. Begin to communicate without conflict
4. Teach your partner it is safe to share with you (before someone will share with you at a deeper level, he or she must be able to share with you at a more superficial level).

EXAMPLE OF CURIOSITY LISTENING:

Suppose Jim has just told you that he is considering buying some new gizmo. (Jim is sharing something with you. When he shares, it is your cue to listen and respond positively). Rather than think about what it's going to cost or where you have space to store it or what happened when your girlfriend's husband bought one of those things, get curious. This gizmo must be important to Jim for some reason. Listen and see if you can find out. If he stops talking, ask him to tell you more about it. Because it's something he likes and knows about, he won't hesitate to talk about it with you.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF CURIOSITY LISTENING:

Suppose Susan is telling you that she is planning to visit her sister. (Although it may just sound like information, it is actually a kind of sharing. Positive interaction must happen at this level before you can expect Susan to share at a deeper level). Rather than leaving it with a "That's nice," become curious about it. What is Susan looking forward to about visiting her sister? Listen for the answer. Ask about it if she doesn't volunteer. Since she brought it up, it's fair game for conversation.

DON'T PRETEND TO BE CURIOUS

That's a kind of manipulation that your partner will pick up on. Also, it will lower your sense of integrity. Keep in mind that you are *wanting* to learn more about your partner so that the both of you can become closer. Your partner may have learned to be careful

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when sharing with you because of previous reactions or disinterest on your part. It will take consistency on your part and time on your partner's part before the communication starts flowing better.

LEARN THE POWER OF INTENTION

By simply intending to be curious, you will become curious. And by becoming curious, you will genuinely be more interested in your partner. Also, if you are listening for ways to be positively curious, it will give you something positive to focus on. You will look more interested. Your face will have a more positive expression.

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Resist the urge to go all out when changing behavior or communication. The bigger the step you take, the more difficult it will be for your partner to adjust. Be curious just a little bit more than usual. Don't try to accomplish more at one time. The finest marble sculptures are made by carving off small chips, one at a time.

Note: This is a low intensity intervention, which is positive and non-confrontational. If even this level of intervention is not possible because of the amount of damage that has already been done or because of the level of conflict or distance in your relationship, you will benefit from getting relationship coaching first. You have to get back on the road before you can expect to get anywhere.

LESSON 4: HOW TO TALK ABOUT SENSITIVE ISSUES

DEEPENING THE TRUST, TO GET EVEN CLOSER

INTIMACY AND VULNERABILITY GO HAND IN HAND.

Because of a lack of trust, couples are often unwilling to open up and talk about issues close to their heart. Too afraid to talk to each other, they can't get emotionally close enough to share. And because they can't share, they can't get close. In this lesson, you will learn how coaching clients get out of this paradoxical situation so they can re-establish intimacy with their partners.

A SENSITIVE ISSUE IS ANY ISSUE THAT PROVOKES A STRONG REACTION.

What is difficult to talk about depends on a person's experience just as much as it depends on the topic. That's why we get to know strangers step by step. We are then less likely to make a verbal blunder that drives the other person away. With your partner, you are more likely to be aware of the sensitive issues, but must still use a step by step process to keep from driving your partner away. This is especially true if there is very little communication between you.

COMMUNICATION SKILL: PROGRESSIVE INTIMATE SHARING:

Step 1a. Sharing basic, impersonal information (e.g. the weather).

Step 1b. Listening for supportive responses which indicate trust at this level.

Step 2a. Sharing information about yourself that is publicly known by many other people (e.g. your job, number of children, etc.)

Step 2b. Listening for supportive responses which indicate trust at this level

Step 3. Sharing information about yourself that is only known by your close friends (e.g. likes dislikes, home activities)

Step 3b. Listening for supportive responses which indicate trust at this level

Step 4. Sharing information that is only known by you (e.g. your hopes, dreams, hurts)

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Step 4b. Listening for supportive responses which indicate trust at this level

EVERY LEVEL OF SHARING REQUIRES A SUPPORTIVE RESPONSE.

Otherwise we will not be able to move to the next level of sharing. One bad response can shift intimacy back to level one. Imagine your partner shares, "I'm lonely" and you respond, "Well, why don't you get a life?" (a non supportive response). Knowing the right things to say is important. It's also important that the levels be taken in order. Shortcuts to intimacy are less stable and more prone to collapse.

FOCUS ON ONE STEP AT A TIME.

You may want to be at a much deeper level than small talk, but if you don't take the time to do the small talk first, you are never going to get to the deeper level. Let your partner get comfortable at one level of communication before going on to the next deeper level. (general rule: let your partner develop an appetite before you serve the dinner).

EXAMPLE: You may really want to talk to Jim (or Susan) about your dreams for him (her) and you. But, just talking about what to do this weekend brings conflict. Rather than trying to fight your way to better communication (which never works!), lighten the conversation a notch or two. Talk about the weather, current events, a great movie that you saw, etc. Keep spending time together and focusing on light communication. When that's going well (and only after that is going well), then go just a little deeper.

MATCH ACTIVITIES TO INTIMACY LEVELS.

To increase your comfort level or your partner's, work on doing things together before talking on a deeper level. Plan activities that you both enjoy or take turns choosing activities that you will do together. Don't rush the intimacy process, but don't stop working together. While some people can develop relationships based only on talking, others need shared activities (especially men) to help them get to a deeper level. Many couples who cannot yet talk about the weather together can start the intimacy process by taking walks together.

ACTIVELY REBUILDING YOUR PARTNER'S COMMUNICATION TRUST

If your partner does not trust you because of the way you communicate, then you will need to earn his or her trust by communicating better. There is no way for your partner to give you trust if you have not earned it. Unfortunately, just letting time pass does nothing to earn your partner's trust.

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METHOD FOR REBUILDING TRUST IN COMMUNICATION

1. Follow the correct order for building intimate communication (from surface level to deep level).
2. Monitor your partner's comfort level and use it as a gauge to when to go deeper (and not your own comfort level).
3. Lightly "touch" on deeper subjects in the midst of easier conversation. This is like putting your toe in the water. Don't just dive in.
4. Stop while you are ahead. If you have successfully touched on a deeper subject for the first time in a while, don't stay there long. Lighten the conversation. Always seek to end with success to increase your partner's desire to talk with you. Leave your partner with a happy memory.

THIRD PERSON METHOD OF DEVELOPING TRUST

Use the third person for particularly difficult topics. One way to help your partner trust you is to show your sensitivity to a real or hypothetical third person's situation.

EXAMPLE: Susan tried to talk to you before about her dream of going back to school to become a dental assistant. You insensitively made fun of her idea and she got upset. If, after you have regained some ground with Susan, you start to talk about her career goals, it may be a little too soon and too sensitive an area for her. If instead, you talk about someone you know who bravely changed her career and how you really admire that person's courage to do that, you will be helping Susan to trust you a little more. How you talk about others tips off your partner as to how you probably think about him or her (even if you don't). When you talk about someone with issues that are similar to your partner's, your partner will be sensitive to how you talk about it.

IF YOU CAN'T TRUST YOUR PARTNER.

If you have a partner who is insensitive to you and who kills the conversation by criticism or other insensitive behavior, you can handle that, too. In this case, waiting for your partner to develop your trust is not likely to be effective. That would just put you in the position of not being able to share and waiting, waiting, waiting. All the while your relationship would be growing cold. Instead, you can work on earning your partner's **respect**.

Earn respect from people you don't trust; earn trust from people you respect.

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RELATIONSHIP SKILL: EARN YOUR PARTNER'S RESPECT

You earn respect when you no longer allow criticisms and other insensitive behavior. One of the single best methods for this is ending the conversation, activity, or phone call immediately—from the first instance of disrespect. Your partner can only be left pointing the finger at him or herself when you have such boundaries.

Of course, you must also be very sure that you are respecting your partner. Hypocrisy and double standards damage respect. If trying to earn respect leads to conflict, it is time for professional help. Coaching clients often say that working on getting respect created all of the changes in their relationship that they had wanted.

SUMMARY

- There are steps for getting to more intimate levels of communication. These steps must be taken in order.
- Intimacy cannot happen without trust because people need to be vulnerable to be intimate.
- When you are not trusted, you can take specific actions to rebuild trust.
- When you don't trust your partner, you can take specific actions to build respect.
- When your partner respects you, the insensitive behavior will stop and trust will be built.
- Get professional help if you are unable to build respect. Your relationship and happiness depend on it.

**You can be the one--the one to make your relationship work, the one to bring you two closer.
You can do it!**

LESSON 5: HOW TO NEVER ARGUE AGAIN

BECAUSE THERE IS NO WAY TO ARGUE YOUR WAY TO A BETTER RELATIONSHIP

END ARGUMENTS ONCE AND FOR ALL

No longer will you have the need to defend your thinking and behavior. Neither will you have the need to prove your partner wrong. Such defending and attacking are the stuff of arguments. The sooner you do away with them and develop a more effective response style, the sooner your relationship will be argument free.

You can never argue your way to a good relationship.

DIFFERENCES DON'T NEED TO BECOME PROBLEMS

Prolonged debates about differences are unnecessary. The *length* of arguments does more damage than their intensity. As they get shorter, you start to have more and more positive time with your partner. This further helps to shrink differences. The way my high conflict clients typically experience improvement is first by having *shorter* conflicts. Then by having fewer conflicts. After this they have more and more positive times together. And then those positive times get longer and longer.

Steps to Progress:

1. Long, frequent, high intensity arguments
2. Short, frequent, high intensity arguments
3. Short, infrequent, high intensity arguments
4. Very short, very infrequent, high intensity arguments
5. Arguing stops. Someone occasionally "loses it", but their partner doesn't get caught up in it and there is no argument.

Knowing that ending arguing is a sequence of stages can help you to continue. People who give up working on a relationship often do so because they expect the intervention to immediately create 100% change. Such a change is unrealistic unless you take a very drastic action. But, such drastic actions bring their own problems. In relationship coaching, I emphasize small positive changes for long lasting results.

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KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ARGUING AND ABUSE

It's important to know the difference between arguments and abuse. They both can be managed very well, but the methods are different. Abusive behavior includes any physical behavior **intended** to harm or threaten you, as well as any behaving that **actually** harms or threatens you. Verbally abusive behavior also includes words that are **intended** to harm or threaten you. If this is the **purpose** of what your partner is saying, then today's method is NOT the one for you to use. (Of course, if you are being physically abused or threatened, you must make safety your primary concern and seek help at once).

FEELING HURT DOES NOT MAKE YOU AN ABUSE VICTIM

Words have the power to anger or sadden partners. Partner's have this kind of power over each other because they love each other. While it may be hard to avoid hurting or angering our partner sometimes, we should never **intend** to do this. We have to have a balance between self expression and love. In such a context, we can stay close even when we get a little hurt or angry. Then, we need to [make-up](#) with our partner as soon as possible.

REASONS PEOPLE MISTAKENLY BELIEVE THEY HAVE TO ARGUE

TO "DEFEND" THEMSELVES

The purpose of real defense is to protect from harm. Arguing does not do that. Sometimes partners will accuse in order to get a defensive response. Because they are too insecure just to ask, they accuse. Then when their partner "defends" and protests, it actually reassures the accuser. This is common with jealous or controlling partners. If their accusation is not defended, they assume that is a sign of guilt. Because they are only temporarily reassured, the pattern is repeated indefinitely.

MYTH: You need to defend yourself whenever your partner suggests you are wrong or that something is wrong with you.

If you believe this myth, it gives your partner power to emotionally control you. This results in a worse relationship for the both of you.

TO "PROVE" THEIR PARTNER WRONG

What is the actual effect of proving a partner wrong? Typically, they continue to respond with more arguing or with sulking and distancing. Greater intimacy does not result.

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Proving other people wrong pushes them away--it does not pull them toward you. And you can't push and pull at the same time.

THE SUBSTITUTE FOR DEFENDING YOURSELF

The best defense is a strong relationship. Responding in a pro-relationship manner gives you power, earns you respect, stops an ongoing pattern of arguing, and sets the stage for a closer relationship. Rather than making you a wimp, it puts you on top.

Reminder: People only continue to do what is completely OR partially successful.

When your partner's arguments are **no longer** effective, he or she will stop arguing with you. When you **no longer** defend, or counterattack, you **no longer** have a button to push and your partner will give up provoking you.

When your partner **no longer** gets any satisfaction, he or she will stop. An ounce of satisfaction is worth a pound of hurt to some people. Just distancing yourself will not be effective, because it doesn't build the relationship.

Are you ready to stop arguing? Then learn this simple sounding but very powerful method:

RELATIONSHIP SKILL: HOW TO MAKE YOUR PARTNER'S ARGUING NO LONGER WORK AT ALL

SEARCH VERY HARD FOR SOMETHING TO AGREE WITH AND IGNORE THE REST.

This will be as unnatural as standing on your head to people who are in the habit of arguing and just as difficult at first. The first time you try this, you may need to go to your room or outside for a while to cool off and think of something you agree with.

Defense is all about picking out the parts of what our partner says that we don't agree with and arguing about them. This new method changes the interaction by doing the opposite. Just pick out the part you do agree with and say **NOTHING** about the other parts.

Although you may not like this method at first, you will never find a more effective solution. And, it will give you a lot of power. Power that you can use to heal the relationship.

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PRACTICAL TIPS FOR GETTING IN THIS HABIT

When you feel verbally attacked,

- walk away,
- calm down,
- think for a while, and then
- go back to agree with your partner
- repeat these steps if you get upset again

The more you use this skill, the less you will need to get away and think first.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES TO HELP YOU SEE HOW TO USE THIS METHOD CORRECTLY

EXAMPLE #1: YOUR PARTNER ACCUSES YOU OF NOT CARING ABOUT HER BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T FOLLOW THROUGH ON SOME PROMISES YOU MADE.

Unhelpful, argumentative way: Point out to her all the things you do that demonstrate how you do care. Possibly throw in some reasons that it seems she doesn't care about you. Maybe, you can use her lack of patience as one example.

Helpful, agreement way #1 (basic technique): "You're right, I did promise to do those things and I didn't get it done (without making any excuses for it)."

Helpful, agreement way #2 (more advanced): "Yes, I can see how it looks like I really don't care when I don't follow through on my promises (without adding any 'buts')"

- Helpful, agreement way #3 (most advanced): "You have a right to feel angry or disappointed when I don't follow through."

EXAMPLE #2: YOUR PARTNER SAYS YOU ARE OVERSPENDING ON UNIMPORTANT THINGS (EVEN THOUGH YOU KNOW THIS IS OBVIOUSLY NOT THE CASE AND MAY EVEN BE SOMETHING YOUR PARTNER IS DOING).

Unhelpful, argumentative way: You point out how your partner is wasting money, not you. Or you attempt to justify all of your expenditures and get into a further argument about what is a necessary expense.

Helpful, agreement way #1 (basic technique): "You're right--I have spent quite a bit of money recently (without saying anything about how it was necessary)."

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Helpful, agreement way #2 (more advanced): "Yes, I'm sure many people could do a better job of budgeting than I'm doing (just this)."

Helpful, agreement way #3 (most advanced): "You are right to be concerned about our finances and the way that I'm spending money (after all, concern is a good thing)."

THE MAIN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *BASIC* AND *ADVANCED* METHODS IS WHEN YOU USE THEM.

At first, only basic techniques should be used. As the relationship gets closer, it's easier to get into emotions.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR USING THIS METHOD

- It's **not** necessary to agree with everything your partner says. Much of what your partner says can be ignored.
- Agreement must be *sincere*. This is a communication technique--not a manipulation technique.
- Don't attack or defend after agreeing (no "buts").
- Apologies are **not** required and are often counterproductive.
- Repeat this process until your partner shifts to a reasonable question. Then, just answer honestly without any defensiveness.
 - Example Question: "Why did you spend so much money on groceries this week?"
 - Example Answer A: "I needed to buy some extra since your parents are coming over for dinner on Sunday." OR
 - Example Answer B: "I didn't realize how much it was until the bill was totaled."
- End the conversation **immediately** if your partner becomes verbally abusive.
 - Example: "You must be pretty dumb to do that."
 - Example response by you: "I'm not listening to your insults" (leave, hang up without any further discussion)
- Arguing weakens the relationship, agreement strengthens it.
 - Example: "You forgot to take out the trash—again!"
 - Example response: "Boy, I sure did."
- You lose *nothing* when you agree with what is true. However, you gain a lot. Agreeing means the other person did not successfully push your button.

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- Finding points of agreement is the *starting point* for a productive talk. This will never happen if you attack and defend.
- Using this method will **end** arguing and the damage that comes from prolonged conflict.

DO YOU WANT TO BE RIGHT, OR DO YOU WANT TO HAVE A GOOD RELATIONSHIP?

Because you are a person who values relationships, you will want to put your relationship ahead of any need to be "right," right? Your partner is likely to still be focused on being right, however. Using today's method, you will help your partner to be right. This will create a win-win for the both of you. He/she will be right (about at least one thing), you will remain in control, and the relationship will start to take a turn for the better for the both of you. What could be better than that?

If you have a longstanding belief that you need to be right, ask yourself how helpful it really has been in your relationships

People seem to realize the importance of agreeing and minimizing differences when first dating. People who have excellent relationships continue the same practice.

LESSON 6: HOW TO HANDLE COMPLAINTS

OTHER PEOPLE COMPLAIN FOR THE SAME REASON THAT WE DO—THEY WANT THINGS TO BE BETTER

Keep The Motivation in Mind

NOBODY WANTS TO HAVE A BAD RELATIONSHIP

Partners can complain for a number of reasons:

- They want you to change in a way that will help them to feel closer to you,
- They are frustrated and don't know how to make positive changes,
- They are trying to create an emotional distance from you that helps them to feel safe,
- They are angry and want to pay you back for something they blame you for,
- They are dissatisfied with something about their lives and take out their frustrations on you because it feels safe to do so, and/or
- They want to cause conflict because it's the only way they know how to interact with you.

Note that none of these reasons are because your partner wants to have a bad relationship with you. Even when partners are trying to create a safe emotional distance, they don't want to have a bad relationship. They simply want to feel safe.

STEP ONE: TRANSFORM THE COMPLAINT

Although complaints are aimed at you, what they are really about are the person who is complaining. He or she wants something. Instead of focusing on defending yourself, focus on what the person actually wants.

EXAMPLE: COMPLAINT ABOUT YOUR FORGETTING

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Seeing this as a message that you are “bad” or “defective” is sure to put you on the defensive. You already know whether you are “bad” or “defective” or not, so you don’t need to be concerned about this part of the message (if it is there at all). Anyhow, it wouldn’t result in a good outcome and would just encourage more complaining from your partner the next time.

The best assumption is that your partner wants the opposite of whatever he or she is complaining about, but is saying it in a negative way. Instead of saying, “Honey, please be careful about locking the door when you go out,” he/she says you stupidly left the house open for anyone to just waltz in and steal your prize goldfish collection, etc.

Respond to this by going with your assumption in a kind of questioning way: “So, you would like me to make sure that I lock up, so that our stuff can be more secure, is that right?”

IF YOU GET A “NO” RESPONSE TO YOUR ASSUMPTIVE QUESTIONING

Simply ask what he or she wants.

“I’m glad you told me my guess is wrong. Please tell me what it is you are wanting, because I can see it’s important to you.”

This kind of response from you may be the first time in your partner’s entire life that he or she has heard such a response. Don’t expect a similar change from your partner.

Although your partner is likely to tell you again what he/she doesn’t want, it may be stated in a different way, helping you to get closer to what he or she does want. Then use the assumptive questioning again. Really try to understand what your partner wants (not *doesn’t* want).

STEP TWO: SCHEDULE A TIME TO TALK

This is an important step because it helps you to put limits on how complaining happens and what will result when it does. Your partner should not be able to use complaining to derail you or get your attention at an inappropriate time. But, if you ignore complaining, things will get worse. This way will help you to keep respect, be more mature than your partner, and still be sensitive to your partner’s needs.

EXAMPLES OF SCHEDULING A TIME TO TALK

“I want our stuff to be safe too. Can we schedule a time to sit down and come up with some ways to help make sure our stuff stays safe?”

“I want my relationship to be better with the kids, too. Can we schedule a time to sit down and come up with some ways to promote my relationship with the kids?”

“I want us to stay out of debt, too. Can we schedule a time to sit down and come up with some ways to make sure we stay out of debt?”

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STEP THREE: HOLD YOUR GROUND

If your partner does not want to schedule a time to talk (the most likely scenario), then *drop it* until you get the same complaint again. At that point, remind your partner of your offer to set a time to talk about it. Do this repeatedly until your partner either stops complaining or sets a time.

If your partner insists on talking about it right away, refuse. Say that you need time to think about it and prepare for your talk. Don't fight, but leave if necessary. If your partner pursues you, then your problem is more than just complaints and needs to be taken to a more serious level (my advice is to do some respect work in individual coaching)..

YOUR ATTITUDE IS IMPORTANT

Becoming upset will be counterproductive, no matter how unreasonable your partner is being. Fighting about how unreasonable someone is is pointless. And, even if you win, you lose. There is simply no way to fight your way to a better relationship.

Try to see complaints as opportunities for working together and getting closer. I often help my clients to start with even very severe things their partners say and move in the direction of working with their partner. Attacks, no matter how severe, are an attempt by partners to somehow make things better for themselves. They may not think about helping you at the same time, but there is no reason that you can't work to make it a win-win and improve your relationship in the process.

FORGET "EASY"

This isn't easy. Good things in life rarely are easy. That's ok. I'm sure you have done other things in your life, too, that weren't easy, but that were worth it. In a relationship, we don't need to be victims, but we don't need to get revenge either. We can combine toughness with love to create the feelings of love and security that each partner wants to have.

BONUS LESSON: HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP FASTER AND EASIER

BECAUSE SOMETIMES TOMORROW DOESN'T COME

GET A COACH

AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, having your own relationship coach makes this process much easier. Your coach is familiar with the changes you need to make to have a good relationship. Also, you will get a lot of encouragement along the way. Daily contact makes sure that everything goes well.

COUNSELING AND COACHING ARE REALLY DIFFERENT

COACHING, UNLIKE COUNSELING is a very practical, skills based approach. The assumption is that the best way to improve your happiness is to improve your relationship. And the best way to improve your relationship is with a plan and small, positive, reality-based, step-by-step actions. For every difficulty in your life, other people have successfully dealt with, and you can too.

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW TO DO SOMETHING, COACHING IS YOUR BEST VALUE

YOU COULD SPEND A WHOLE YEAR in counseling and only learn a couple of important skills, if any. In coaching, you get what you need, when you need it, to get improvement fast (remember the example with Joe and his wife in lesson one?). The more serious your problems, the more quickly you need to get help.

I WOULD LOVE TO WORK ON YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU

Visit my websites at www.relationship-coach.org and www.greatrelationshipcoach.org . You will find:

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- One month coaching packages for individuals and couples who need help improving their relationships,
- One time “Help Me Now!” consultations to help you know what to do now.
- Articles for singles, married, and in-between.
- A contact form to write to me (Coach Jack). I spend two hours each morning answering e-mails. I would be happy to answer yours, too.

I wish you all the best in your relationship.

Coach Jack

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PS Have you seen my new book (paperback, 246 pages)? It was especially written for women who have angry, selfish, unhappy, or avoidant partners. It is available from online booksellers and you can take a [Look Inside the Book at Amazon.com](#). The title is: *What to Do When He Won't Change: Saving Your Marriage or Relationship When He Is Angry, Selfish, Unhappy, or Avoids You.*

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