

A W O R K B O O K

Developing Habits for Relationship Success

I have a female partner



‡ BRENT J. ATKINSON ‡

Developing Habits for Relationship Success

A Norton Professional Book

Developing Habits for Relationship Success

My partner is female

Third Edition

Brent J. Atkinson



W.W. Norton & Company
New York • London

Copyright © 2006 by Brent J. Atkinson

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America
First Edition

For information about permission to reproduce selections from this
CD-Rom, write to Permissions, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.,
500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110

Production Manager: Leeann
Graham Manufacturing by Cycle Software

Contents

Why Do Intimate Relationships Succeed or Fail?	1
Ten Habits of Successful Intimate Partners	6
WHEN YOU FEEL MISUNDERSTOOD OR MISTREATED	6
1. <i>Avoiding a Judgmental Attitude</i>	6
2. <i>Standing Up for Yourself without Putting Your Partner Down</i>	8
3. <i>Finding the Understandable Part</i>	10
4. <i>Giving Equal Regard</i>	11
5. <i>Offering Assurance</i>	12
6. <i>Identifying and Explaining What Is at Stake</i>	13
BUILDING THE EMOTIONAL BOND	14
7. <i>Being Curious about Your Partner's World</i>	14
8. <i>Keeping Sight of the Positive</i>	15
9. <i>Making and Responding to Bids for Connection</i>	15
10. <i>Pursuing Shared Meaning</i>	16
The Master Aptitude: Influencing Your Moods and Attitudes	17

PART I: HOW CAN YOU GET MORE UNDERSTANDING, COOPERATION, AND RESPECT FROM MY PARTNER? **19**

If you want more respect or cooperation from My Partner, you'll need to learn to think and act more like people who almost always get the respect and cooperation from their partners that they desire. Studies suggest that the way you respond when you feel misunderstood or mistreated by My Partner will dramatically influence the odds that you'll be treated better by her in the future. People who get treated well by their partners respond effectively at the moments when they are *not* feeling well-treated. Responding effectively means knowing how to stand up for yourself without putting My Partner down. Part I of this workbook includes worksheets and exercises that will help you develop more ability to respond effectively when you feel misunderstood or mistreated by My Partner.

1. The Sequence: Knowing How and When to Implement Each Predictive Habit When Upsets Occur	21
Knowledge of the 10 habits that predict relationship success is a critical first step, but people destined to succeed in their relationships also know <i>when</i> particular habits are needed, and how to use them effectively.	
SUMMARY OF THE SEQUENCE	22
UNDERSTANDING THE SEQUENCE	23
More detail about each step of the sequence	
GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SEQUENCE	33
Important reminders about how to implement the sequence	
FLOW CHART: ORDERING OF THE SEQUENCE	34
This chart illustrates the ordering and flow of the steps involved in the sequence for implementing the predictive habits during upsets.	
SAMPLE SELF-REMINDERS	35
In order to focus on improving your reactions to My Partner, you'll often need to calm yourself down, and remind yourself that it's in your own best interest to develop the ability to react more effectively.	
ATTITUDE CHECK	36
You can dramatically impact the odds that you will get more understanding or cooperation from My Partner by giving attention to your attitude. This section will help you identify judgmental thoughts you may tend to have about My Partner.	
DEVELOPING NON-JUDGMENTAL EXPLANATIONS FOR MY PARTNER'S ATTITUDE OR ACTIONS	37
If you want more respect and understanding from My Partner, you'll need to find nonjudgmental ways of making sense of her attitude and actions. This section will help you develop a more positive view of My Partner.	
FINDING THE UNDERSTANDABLE PART: COMMON "HIDDEN" REASONS	40
The reasons for My Partner's feelings, intentions, or motivations will not always be obvious, and it's to your advantage to become good at finding the reasons that are sometimes difficult to see at first. Here's a list of possible reasons that might make My Partner's thinking or actions more understandable to you.	
CORE DIFFERENCES IN WAYS OF MAINTAINING EMOTIONAL STABILITY	41
Studies suggest that 67% of the things that couples argue about stem from differences in personalities or priorities, for which there are no generally agreed upon standards for "right" or "wrong." Which of these core areas do you and My Partner	

differ on? Rather than criticizing each other, successful partners try to accept these legitimate differences and work with each other toward compromises.	
WHAT'S DRIVING YOU?	42
People who are destined to succeed in their relationships realize that the reasons why they feel or act as they do often run deeper than the present situation. Often, it's not the present situation that's involved so much as what it symbolizes. There's something bigger at stake—an underlying need, fear, dream, or priority. This section contains examples of underlying needs that often drive the feelings and actions of people in specific situations.	
STANDING UP FOR YOURSELF WITHOUT PUTTING MY PARTNER DOWN	43
The extent to which you stand up for yourself and the extent to which you have critical feelings toward My Partner are two different things. Which of the four most common combinations best describes your typical reactions to My Partner when you're upset?	
STANDING UP FOR YOURSELF WITHOUT PUTTING MY PARTNER DOWN: THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS	44
Use this section to better understand the quadrants on page 43.	
2. Practice Forms	45
REVIEWING YOUR REACTIONS	46
Use this section to review how effectively you reacted in any upsetting situation that occurred between you and My Partner.	
STUDYING YOUR STATE OF MIND	47
Your brain is conditioned to produce highly specific mood states when you get upset with My Partner. To respond to her differently, you will need to become more aware of the mood states that you find yourself in, and figure out how to switch gears.	
PRACTICING NEW REACTIONS	48
Because your brain has become conditioned to automatically produce specific attitudes and actions when you're upset with My Partner, you'll need to <i>recondition</i> your brain in order to react differently. Reconditioning requires repetitive practice.	
WHEN YOU'RE UPSET	50
Use this section at moments when you're actively feeling upset with My Partner. It will help you get into a frame of mind that will enable you to respond effectively.	
A GUIDE FOR GETTING A SHIFT IN YOUR OWN INTERNAL STATES	52

Once you have practiced the art of mood shifting with your therapist a few times, this section will be helpful in guiding you through the internal moves involved in getting shifts to happen on your own.

COMPLAINTS ON TAPE 55

To help you develop more ability to deliver complaints to My Partner effectively, and to help My Partner practice responding to your complaints well, your therapist may ask you to record some complaints on audiotape. Here are the instructions.

DEVELOPING A NON-JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDE 56

If you have a habit of judging others, it's very unlikely that you'll break the habit simply by realizing that you're shooting yourself in the foot. You'll need to think through how you can stand up for yourself without judging others in each upsetting or annoying situation you encounter.

3. Special Circumstances 57

WHEN MY PARTNER IS CLEARLY WRONG! 58

While most of the disagreements that arise between you and My Partner will likely be over issues for which there are no universally agreed upon standards for right and wrong, there may be some things that My Partner does that are wrong by most anyone's standard. This section will help you know how to respond effectively in these situations.

TAKING A FIRM STAND 60

This sheet provides guidelines for situations in which it may be necessary for you to withdraw your cooperation or participation from My Partner for a period of time. Please do not attempt to implement the guidelines on this sheet without first discussing it with your therapist.

PART II: STRENGTHENING MY FRIENDSHIP WITH MY PARTNER 63

Respectful interaction over your differences is necessary, but will not be enough to ensure relationship success. Successful partners develop strong friendships, connecting regularly with caring and tender feelings, and sharing vulnerable feelings with each other. Part II of the workbook will prompt you to think or act in ways that might help you connect with the "softer" feelings that can help create an emotional bond between you and My Partner. The most important thing isn't to complete the exercises, but rather to use them to help you connect with the soft feelings, and share them with My Partner. If you don't

- actually feel closer to My Partner as you do the exercises, be sure to discuss this with your therapist. It will do little good to “go through the motions” if you don’t actually feel closer to My Partner.
- 4. Being Curious about My Partner’s World** **65**
- KNOWING MY PARTNER'S INTERNAL WORLD **66**
- These exercises will prompt you to investigate My Partner’s internal world. See if you can connect with genuine curiosity as you do the exercises.
- WHAT’S ON MY PARTNER'S MIND? **68**
- Do you know the things that are weighing the heaviest on My Partner’s mind these days? This exercise will help you remember to ask her about them. See if you can connect with tender or caring feelings as you talk with My Partner about the things that weigh on her mind.
- 5. Keeping Sight of the Positive** **69**
- APPRECIATIONS **70**
- A powerful way you can improve your relationship that costs you very little is to simply notice positive things about My Partner’s personality or actions. This exercise will help you pay attention to the things you appreciate. After you identify an “appreciation,” take a moment to let yourself feel thankful toward My Partner.
- EXTRA POSITIVE MOMENTS **71**
- Another way you can strengthen you friendship is to identify and acknowledge the moment or moments recently when you felt the most positive about My Partner or about your relationship. This exercise will help you remember to do this. Take an extra moment to enjoy the positive feeling that comes up with your recollection of the extra positive moment.
- REMEMBERING THE GOOD TIMES **72**
- People destined to succeed in their relationships often talk about positive memories. This sheet will help you identify those positive memories. Take some time to enjoy the good feelings that come from these memories.
- THINKING ABOUT MY PARTNER **73**
- This exercise will help you implement several friendship-building activities at once. See if the overall effect of doing the exercise generates positive feelings inside of you.
- 6. Making and Responding to Bids for Connection** **74**
- SMALL ACTS OF CARING **75**
- Research studies suggest that partners who initiate small acts of caring or connection, delivered without strings attached, are

<p>more likely to end up in happy relationships than partners who neglect such small acts. Notice if you get a good feeling when you think of doing some of these things for My Partner.</p>	
CONNECTING WITH THE INTIMACY STATES	76
<p>Brain scientists have discovered that our brains are equipped with four specific mood states that are critical to our ability to form emotional bonds with our intimate partners. This exercise will help you connect with these mood states.</p>	
PRACTICE LOG	77
<p>Use this form to document your attempts to connect with the intimacy states, and discover how you can connect more easily in the future.</p>	
PRACTICING THE HIGH–LOW CONVERSATION	78
<p>Partners who succeed in their relationships regularly have emotionally supportive conversations. This sheet will help you prepare to have one type of emotionally supportive conversation.</p>	
HIGH–LOW CONVERSATION: GUIDELINES FOR THE LISTENER	79
HIGH–LOW CONVERSATION: GUIDELINES FOR THE SPEAKER	81
<p>These sections provide guidelines for creating emotionally supportive conversations.</p>	
HIGH–LOW REVIEW: YOUR EXPERIENCE LISTENING	82
HIGH–LOW REVIEW: YOUR EXPERIENCE SPEAKING	83
<p>These sheets will help you review your conversations and identify anything that might be “blocking” you from participating in these conversations in a heartfelt way.</p>	
7. Pursuing Shared Meaning	84
SUPPORTING EACH OTHER’S DREAMS	84
<p>This exercise will help you and My Partner find ways to explore and honor each of your values, priorities and dreams.</p>	

Why Do Intimate Relationships Succeed or Fail?

IN THE EARLY 1980s, marriage researchers set out to find exactly how people who succeed in their relationships differ from those who fail. In the first year of these studies, researchers carefully observed and measured everything that could possibly be related to success or failure (e.g., attitudes, communication styles, amount of anger, amount of tenderness). They put couples in apartments equipped with video cameras in every room (except the bathroom) and recorded the behavior of each member of each couple. They also asked the participants to have conversations about specific topics while the researchers monitored their heart rates and measured their physical movements. When the researchers were satisfied that they had measured everything that might be related to the couples' eventual success, they simply turned them loose and then tracked them down up to 15 years later to see how they were doing. Which couples were divorced, which were unhappily married, and which had thriving marriages? Not only did they succeed in pinpointing the interpersonal habits that distinguish people who succeed from those who fail, but they found that some interpersonal habits are so crucial that the absence of them virtually guarantees marital failure. By measuring the relative presence or absence of specific interpersonal habits, researchers found that they could predict with over 90% accuracy which marriages would eventually succeed or fail! People who have these crucial habits almost always end up in happy marriages, whereas people who don't, almost always end up divorced or unhappily married.

These studies have revolutionized our understanding of intimate relationships. Previously, couples therapists had to proceed on the basis of what they thought couples needed, or what generally accepted theories in the field told them to do. Now, for the first time, we have scientific evidence about what couples who succeed and fail actually do. This information has been filtering into public awareness through books such as John Gottman's *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, and *The Relationship Cure*. These studies present compelling evidence that there are personal prerequisites for succeeding in an intimate relationship. If

you want to succeed in love, you simply must have specific interpersonal abilities, and we now know exactly what these abilities are. If you have these abilities, the chances are excellent that you will be treated with respect and admiration by your intimate partner. If you don't have them, the evidence suggests that your relationship future is quite dim.

Some of the most important of these successful interpersonal habits involve actions and ideas that you must be able to carry out *without* the help of your partner. In fact, you must carry out these activities precisely when your partner is making it most difficult for you to do so. Researchers have discovered that the way people respond when they feel misunderstood or mistreated by their partners dramatically influences the odds that their partners will treat them better or worse in the future. All people in lasting intimate relationships feel misunderstood or mistreated at one time or another. At these times, some people respond in ways that make it less likely that their partners will mistreat or misunderstand them in the future, and some people respond in ways that dramatically increase the odds that they will be even more misunderstood or mistreated. The way you respond to the worst in My Partner plays a central role in determining whether or not you'll experience something better from her in the future. These studies suggest that most of us vastly underestimate the potential for the positive influence that we can have on our partners. Evidence suggests that you can dramatically influence the way that your partner treats you, regardless of whether she is deliberately trying to be nicer to you or not. This is because her level of motivation has so much to do with how you interact with her. We are almost guaranteed love relationships in which we feel respected and valued if we have certain interpersonal abilities. If you find yourself in a relationship in which you feel consistently misunderstood or mistreated, you don't have to wait around, hoping that your partner will start treating you better. You can largely take the matter into your own hands. You can't control your partner, but you can dramatically influence the odds that she will treat you better in the future. You can do this *by making sure that you are responding well to any unfair or disrespectful treatment you may be receiving from her right now.*

Some of these habits that predict relationship success are obvious. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that people who tend to start out discussions with harsh criticisms will be unlikely to succeed, or that those who are unwilling to accept influence from their partners when making decisions will be similarly unsuccessful. But some of the important predictors are not so obvious, nor easily observed, because they have more to do with what a person is *thinking* than what she or he says or does. Two different husbands may each apologize and adjust their plans to accommodate when their wives criticize them harshly for forgetting that they had previously agreed to go out to dinner with friends. Husband 1 will end up divorced, and husband 2 will remain happily married. Why? While husband 1 apologizes and adjusts his plans,

inside he's thinking thoughts like, "She shouldn't get so upset over such a little thing. If it's not one thing, it's another. She's never satisfied. I would never act like that if she forgot something. She's just like her mother!" In contrast, husband 2 is thinking things like, "Why is she so upset? There must be more going on here than meets the eye. My forgetting about this must mean something to her that I don't really understand. I've got to find out the emotional logic behind her reactions." Although the outward actions of the two husbands look the same (apologizing and accepting influence), clearly these husbands have vastly different attitudes, and attitudes are as potent as behaviors when predicting relationship success or failure.

It is exceedingly rare to find a situation in which one partner is meeting the prerequisites when the other partner isn't. Granted, the shortcomings of one partner are often more public or provocative than the shortcomings of the other (i.e., one partner flies into rages and throws things while the other tries to placate and calm the raging partner), but when each of the prerequisites is weighted equally, partners in distressed relationships are generally a match for each other. Partners entering therapy rarely see things this way. Inwardly, if not outwardly, each partner generally thinks that the partner's shortcomings are more serious than his or her own. Usually, this is because there are certain "dysfunctional" things that their partners do that they know they don't do themselves. What they don't realize is that there are many different interpersonal habits that are predictive of relationship success or failure. They are focused on the particular dysfunctional habits of the partner, not realizing that some of their own habits are just as powerfully corrosive to the relationship. The good news is that partners who are able to see and modify their own dysfunctional habits will most often find that their partner follows. This is due to the powerful combination of abilities possessed by people destined for relationship success. They require that they be treated with respect, but at the same time they also make it easy for their partners to treat them with respect.

The bottom line is this: If you want My Partner to treat you better, you need to think and act like people who naturally elicit respect and cooperation from their partners. Researchers have studied such people, and have identified exactly how they do it. There are specific skills and attitudes involved in knowing how to bring out the best in others, and there is evidence that people who know how to do this are more successful not only in their intimate relationships, but in most areas of their lives. Of course, we all have the ability to do this sometimes, but the people who succeed in getting respect and admiration from their partners can do it even when they feel really misunderstood or mistreated. These are the moments that separate the men from the boys, and the women from the girls, psychologically speaking. If you can't stay on track in these times, you're probably not going to be one of those who ends up with a partner who understands, respects, and cares about them.

Your therapist will be able to see exactly where you are getting off track in your relationship with your partner, and help you get back on track. When you do, you'll find that My Partner will begin treating you differently. Don't get the wrong idea: My Partner probably isn't any more on track than you are. She isn't doing herself any favors, either. The way she is treating you only makes it more difficult for you to respond to her the way she wants you to, right? The hope is that she will be willing to work with your couples therapist on these things too—your therapist will certainly try to convince her that it would be in her own best interest to do so, but please realize that you yourself can dramatically influence the odds that she will become motivated to work on changing the way she treats you.

Each week we encounter people who tell us stories about how poorly they have been treated by their partners. After spewing the details of their mate's most recent episode of incredibly selfish or disrespectful behavior, they usually look at us as if to say, "Now how on earth am I supposed to respond to that?" Half of these people are already convinced that there is no good answer to this question. In fact, they resent even having to ask the question, believing that they shouldn't have to deal with this crap in the first place. But the evidence suggests that if they continue dismissing the question, they will kiss their relationships goodbye. Why? Because marital success has more to do with responding well when your partner seems selfish or inconsiderate than it has to do with avoiding actually being selfish or inconsiderate in the first place. It's not that selfish or disrespectful behavior doesn't matter, it does. Repetitive selfish behavior is destructive in relationships. The problem is that you are not a very reliable judge about what truly selfish behavior is. The reason why none of us is a reliable judge in this respect is because there are hundreds of yardsticks for measuring selfishness, and we tend to use our own, not our partner's yardstick. Let's take a hypothetical example: A wife accepts an invitation to go out with her friends on Friday night without asking her husband if that would be OK with him. The husband considers that to be really inconsiderate, and feels justified in criticizing her harshly for it. But the fact is, this wife wouldn't be upset at the husband if he made similar arrangements with his friends without consulting her. In fact, the wife has a whole different ideal for how a relationship should be. In her view, partners should each be free to make other arrangements unless plans between the two of them have been specifically made. She wouldn't dream of being so selfish as to try to restrict his freedom by asking him to consult her every time he wanted to plan something with his friends. Obviously, he didn't see it that way, and he let her have a piece of his mind! Well, if she wasn't behaving selfishly before he harshly criticized her, now she is! She slams the door in his face. Feeling perfectly entitled to his feeling of contempt about her response, the next time he sees her he is sneering at her for her childish tantrum. Needless to say, her response to his contempt isn't exactly what he was hoping for.

And so the story goes. It began with the husband's *perception* that his wife was being inconsiderate. If he had been able to respond differently, she might have been willing to try to work out a more mutually satisfying plan. But he felt perfectly justified in his reaction. After all, hadn't she done the selfish thing first? She doesn't see it that way. She believes that he is the one who was selfish, trying to control her by limiting her freedom to schedule time with her friends. She wouldn't dream of selfishly restricting him like that! Of course, his priority on collaboration isn't any more selfish than her priority on mutual freedom. As the discussion unfolded, she didn't respond any better to the perception that he was being selfish than he did to the perception that she was being inconsiderate, and so the whole thing blew up. But it all would have been avoided if either of them had been able to stand up for themselves without putting the other person down. If you expect to get more respect from My Partner, you simply must be able to do this.

In the coming weeks, your therapist will help you develop 10 specific abilities that are highly predictive of relationship success (summarized on pp. 6–16). If you develop and maintain these habits, you are nearly guaranteed a relationship in which you feel valued, respected, and loved. Six of these 10 interpersonal habits are used to negotiate upsets, the other four have to do with how you think about and act toward your partner when you're *not* upset with each other. Research studies show that successful resolution of conflict is not enough to predict happy and stable marriages. Only 40% of those who divorce report severe fighting as the cause. The other 60% cite a gradual drifting apart, or the absence of fondness and admiration as the cause. In the second half of your therapy, you'll focus on developing or enhancing four habits that strengthen your friendship with My Partner and create a sense of emotional closeness in your relationship. Studies suggest that finding and maintaining emotional closeness is the key to lasting happiness. However, if you are feeling disrespected, criticized, or dismissed, you're unlikely to feel able to implement the four abilities that create emotional closeness, and you probably don't even *want to*. That's why therapists often begin therapy by helping partners change their habits of reacting when they feel mistreated or misunderstood. Intimacy building comes later, when there is a foundation of respect.

Ten Habits of Successful Intimate Partners

SINCE THE EARLY 1980s, marriage researchers have conducted a series of long-term studies in which they have examined the question: What do people who are destined to succeed in their relationships actually do differently from those who are destined to fail? Researchers have identified specific interpersonal habits or abilities that distinguish people who are destined to succeed. By assessing the presence or absence of these interpersonal habits, researchers have been able to predict with over 90% accuracy which people will eventually divorce. If you want to succeed in your relationship with My Partner, you'll need to have interpersonal habits like the ones described below. Some of them have to do with how you react when you feel misunderstood or mistreated by My Partner, and others are related to how much you think and act in ways that are likely to promote fondness and admiration between you and My Partner.

WHEN YOU FEEL MISUNDERSTOOD OR MISTREATED

1. Avoiding a Judgmental Attitude

Research suggests that without meaning to, intimate partners often trigger defensiveness in each other before they even open their mouths. The attitude you have when you're upset will tend to breed cooperativeness or defensiveness in My Partner. A *judgmental* attitude is the most damaging to a relationship. You know you have a judgmental attitude when you find yourself thinking things like this:

- She shouldn't have done that.
- That was really inconsiderate!
- She's never satisfied.
- How could anybody think that way?

Marriage researchers have discovered that, the vast majority of the time, when partners are upset with each other, neither partner has done anything that is

intrinsically wrong. For example, 69% of marital upsets arise from conflicting values, priorities, beliefs, or personal tendencies for which there is no generally accepted standard. Marriages start to slide when partners assume there is a “correct” standard to which they are entitled to hold their partners accountable. For example, consider the following questions:

- How much arguing is acceptable in marriage?
- How much money should be spent on what type of things?
- How much of life should be planned out versus “make it up as we go?”
- Should we work first, then play, or play along the way?
- To what extent is it OK to socialize with members of the opposite sex?
- To what extent is it appropriate for a married person to wear sexy or revealing clothing in public?
- Who should do what chores around the house, how often?
- How neat and organized should our life be?
- How much time should you put into your career versus family?
- How important is it to talk about our feelings?
- How much discipline should be used with the kids?
- How much time should married people spend together versus time with friends?
- How much time should we spend with our extended families?
- How much should we keep each other informed as to where we’ve been, and whom we’ve been with?
- What kind of sexual activities are acceptable (or expected)?
- How much financial risk should we take?

Studies suggest that there are a wide variety of legitimate opinions that partners can have on such questions. There are happily married and unhappily married risk takers, and both happily and unhappily married conservatives. Some couples who place high value on personal freedom are happily married and some are not. Some happily married couples argue a lot and some couples who argue a lot end up divorced. Happily married partners differ on scores of important values and priorities, but they have one thing in common: They avoid assuming that their partner’s values, priorities, or opinions are *wrong*, and instead assume that there are many potentially legitimate ways to live life. People destined to succeed understand that if you assume the worst of your partner, you’ll get the worst from your partner. Instead, they give their partners the benefit of the doubt; that is, they assume that there is a legitimate reason for their partner’s words or actions, even if they don’t know what it is yet. Beneath even seemingly provocative behavior on the part of their partners, they assume that their partners are pursuing legitimate dreams or priorities. In contrast, when people who are destined to fail in their relationships are faced with words or actions from their partners that are upsetting to them, they assume that their

partners are acting this way because they have misguided reasoning, priorities, motivations, or intentions, or that their partners have faulty personality characteristics (e.g., “my partner is just lazy, controlling, irresponsible, insensitive”).

Many of us grow up feeling that we don’t have the right to be upset with someone unless that person did something wrong. So, when we find ourselves upset, we tend to automatically assume that the other person did something wrong. Otherwise, we wouldn’t feel entitled to be upset! Successful people find a way out of this dilemma, realizing that it’s normal for people to get upset with each other when their expectations are at cross-purposes. Nobody has to be wrong.

2. Standing Up for Yourself without Putting Your Partner Down

Dropping the idea that My Partner is wrong doesn’t mean that you have to give in. People who are destined to succeed believe that their own opinions and expectations are just as important as those of their partners. Rather than criticizing or trying to prove their partners wrong, people who are destined to succeed in their relationships simply ask their partners to “move over and make room for me.” They ask their partners to meet them half way. *Standing up for yourself involves asking (and requiring, if necessary) that your partner give your priorities, viewpoints, or preferences equal regard with her own.* Successful partners both require that their feelings be respected, and at the same time make it easy for the other person to be respectful. They make it easy for their partners to be respectful by refraining from making the assumption that their partners are wrong. They require that their feelings be respected by avoiding criticizing their partners and instead asking their partners to work toward solutions that take both of their preferences into account.

When couples are distressed, it is generally the case that neither partner has the ability to stand up for him- or herself without putting down the other person. Instead, partners criticize and never state exactly what they want, try to present their own point of view as the only reasonable option, or give in to their partners while secretly thinking bad things about them. People who swear that their partners are control freaks are often amazed to learn that their partners are actually willing to compromise when they are asked to “move over and make room for me” rather than judged or criticized. Of course, this doesn’t *always* happen. Sometimes, even in situations where one partner avoids judging the other, and instead simply asks the other to “move over,” the other won’t move over! This is the real test. It’s often at this point where the first partner loses focus and slides back into judging the other, or giving in. The result is a predictably negative slide. People who are destined for success refrain from making a big deal of it when their partners don’t seem

willing to meet them half way. They simply hold their ground and continue to insist that their opinions or priorities be given equal consideration.

There are at least three kinds of situations in which people who succeed in relationships stand up firmly for themselves: (1) when they are feeling criticized; (2) when they are feeling dismissed; and (3) when their partners put them down.

A. When Your Partner Criticizes You. When feeling criticized, people destined for relationship success readily stand up for themselves. For example, when My Partner implies you did something wrong by failing to stop at the grocery store on the way home from work when you knew in the morning that she would need groceries to make dinner, you might say something like this:

I think maybe I know what the problem is. It sounds like you're upset because you think that I did something that is just wrong, but I don't see it that way. I think you just have a different idea from mine about how you'd like things to be. I'd like to have a relationship where nobody has to worry about forgetting the details. I'd like it if we could both just go with the flow more. You want us to be more organized and think in advance. I don't think there's anything wrong with that, but I hardly think it's the only way to live. I'm willing to keep trying to work with you on that, but it's pretty hard when I feel you are implying that there's something wrong with me for being different from you! I have just as much right to an easygoing life as you do to a planned and efficient one.

Notice that the above statement didn't include anything like, "You shouldn't be so upset!" or "You're overreacting!" People who are destined to succeed in their relationships stand up for themselves without putting their partners down.

B. When Your Partner Dismisses Your Feelings or Opinions. People destined to succeed in their relationships don't expect to have their own way, but neither will they allow their opinions or expectations to be dismissed or ignored. When feeling dismissed, they say things like this:

Listen to me. I'm not saying that your way is wrong, or that we have to do things my way, but I am saying that my feelings are as important as yours and I need for you to be willing to work with me here.

Again, notice what *wasn't* said: "How could you think like that? You're missing the boat. You've got your priorities mixed up. You're being selfish."

C. When Your Partner Puts You Down. Sometimes My Partner may be so upset that she acts disgusted with you or says degrading things to you. When this happens to people who are destined to succeed in their relationships, they

stand up for themselves firmly, but they do it without making a federal case out of their partner's "offense." They usually begin by letting their partners know that they are willing to listen if their partner can stop putting them down. (e.g., "Obviously you're really upset, and there must be a good reason. I'm willing to try to understand, but I don't think I can because I'm feeling attacked. Would you try to slow down and just tell me why you're upset?") If their partners keep putting them down, they simply withdraw their cooperation or participation for as long as their partners continue acting in ways that seem disrespectful. There's no formula for the best thing to say when you reach this point. Sometimes, a simple, "I don't want to talk to you right now" works as well as more complicated statements. More important than what you say is your *attitude*. Whether angry, frustrated, or irritated, these attitudes all work just fine. However, self-righteous, disgusted, or contemptuous attitudes are quite another matter. Studies show that partners destined to succeed get angry but not disgusted, or if they do momentarily, they don't stay there. Instead, people who are destined to be treated better by their partners have thoughts like these: "It's not a crime that my partner was losing it. She wouldn't have acted that way unless she was really feeling threatened. I did what I needed to do to stand up for myself, and I'll do it again, if needed. If I can stand up for myself (like I just did) without making a big deal of how wrong my partner was, she won't do it as much in the future."

3. Finding the Understandable Part

When disagreements arise, most of us tend to think of our own position as reasonable and our partner's position as unreasonable. However, at some point in the argument, those who succeed manage to find something understandable about what their partner is saying or wanting, even if they can't agree overall. They seem to understand an important principle: If you want to receive understanding, first *give* understanding. Many partners are hesitant to acknowledge anything understandable about their partner's point of view, thinking that if they give an inch, their partners will take a mile. People destined to succeed in their relationships don't worry about this, because they know that they can always stand up for their own point of view later. There is no rush. They know that just because they acknowledge something legitimate about their partner's point of view doesn't mean that their own point of view isn't legitimate, too. They are able to do two things in succession: Acknowledge the understandable part of their partner's opinions and then stand up for their own opinions, if needed. If you have difficulty acknowledging the understandable part of My Partner's feelings often, it may be because you don't feel confident that you can stand up for your own feelings in an effective manner. In couples therapy, your therapist will help you both stand up better

for yourself and become more able to acknowledge understandable aspects of My Partner's feelings or actions.

Because the understandable reasons for My Partner's feelings, intentions, or motivations will not always be obvious, it's to your advantage to become good at finding the reasons that are sometimes difficult to see at first. Here's a list of possible reasons that might make her thinking or actions more understandable to you:

- Maybe My Partner didn't realize how important this was to you.
- Maybe My Partner was having a bad day.
- Maybe My Partner didn't have all the facts.
- Maybe My Partner was reading something between the lines that you didn't intend to say.
- Maybe this issue was more important to My Partner than you previously understood.
- Maybe My Partner wasn't upset so much about this particular situation as she was about where she feared things might be headed.
- Maybe My Partner felt threatened by you in a way that you didn't understand.
- Maybe My Partner was afraid she was going to lose something very important to her if she did things the way you wanted.
- Maybe My Partner was acting this way because she felt (or had recently felt) criticized or dismissed by you, and she felt resentful and uncooperative because of this.
- Maybe My Partner has really different priorities or expectations from yours. Maybe she was acting in a way that was perfectly consistent with her priorities. You just don't like it because her priorities are different from yours, but that doesn't make them *wrong*.

Remember, just because you can find understandable or legitimate reasons for My Partner's actions or viewpoints doesn't mean you have to give in. Your feelings are probably understandable, too. Things work out best when you give My Partner the benefit of the doubt, find the understandable part of her feelings or opinions, and also ask her, and if necessary require her to give equal consideration to yours. But you can't skip the first step! As long as My Partner feels criticized or misunderstood, she'll be less able to be respectful of your feelings and opinions.

4. *Giving Equal Regard*

The best relationships operate like democracies: one person, one vote. When people go to cast their votes in a democratic society, nobody stands at the

polling place deciding if their reasoning is good enough to allow their votes to count. Their opinions count equally, regardless of what anyone thinks of their reasoning. The same is true in successful intimate relationships. Successful partners give equal regard, regardless of whether they agree with each other or not. They may argue tooth and nail for their own points of view, but in the end, they are willing to work toward finding mutually satisfying solutions. Either explicitly or implicitly, people destined for relationship success deliver the following message to their partners: “You don’t really have to explain yourself. If that’s how you feel, then I’m going to make room for your feelings, too. You’re my partner, and your feelings should count as much as mine, even if I don’t agree with them.” In contrast, people who are destined to fail in their relationships are often only willing to give equal regard if they feel that their partners’ points of view are compelling enough to merit concessions. Of course, the problem is that most of us rarely find our partners’ points of view as compelling as our own.

In successful relationships, the willingness to give equal regard doesn’t necessarily come at the front end of an argument. In fact, sometimes when researchers looked at the arguing style of partners destined to succeed, they couldn’t distinguish them from partners destined to fail. The differences only became clear later, after each partner had exhausted efforts to convince the other. Both successful and unsuccessful partners often argue vigorously for their own points of view, and often show little regard for their partners’ viewpoints during the argument. However, in the end, successful partners are willing to give equal regard. Once people are confident that, when the dust settles, their partners are going to be willing to give them equal regard, they can each argue persuasively along the way with less risk that the other person will take offense.

5. *Offering Assurance*

Whenever an argument seems to be stuck or unproductive, one of the most effective things you can do is to stop and ask yourself, “Does My Partner think I’m saying that she’s *wrong*, or *out-of-line* in some way?” or “Does My Partner think I’m saying ‘It’s my way or the highway?’” When arguments are unproductive, the answer to these questions is almost always “yes.” The most powerful thing you can do at this point is to simply offer an assurance, by saying something like, “Look, I was pretty worked up back then, and I’m sure you felt criticized by me, but I don’t really think there’s anything wrong with what you did. It’s just different from what I wanted.” Another example of an assurance might be, “I know we have a difference of opinion about how to prioritize things here, and I don’t want you to get the idea that I’m saying that things have to be entirely *my way*. I’m willing to work with you on this.” Of course, you can’t offer assurances if you are thinking judgmental thoughts

about My Partner. If you say one thing, but don't have a matching attitude, My Partner won't believe you. The offering of an assurance is completely dependent upon your ability to shift from a judgmental to nonjudgmental attitude. However, if you are able to avoid a judgmental attitude and also offer assurances, you'll be successful in influencing My Partner a high percentage of the time.

6. Identifying and Explaining What Is at Stake

People who are destined to succeed in their relationships realize that the reasons they are upset or have trouble doing what their partners want sometimes run deeper than the present situation. Often, there is something bigger at stake. Your ability to explain the underlying reasons for being upset will help your partner become more cooperative and understanding. At some point during an argument people destined for success pause and take the conversation to a different level, saying something like, "OK, I think I just figured out why this bothers me so much . . . I'm worried that. . ." Consider the following common "bigger" reasons why you may be upset or unable to consider My Partner's opinion or request:

- You're worried that she is sending a "bigger message" that applies to more than just the present situation. (Example: "Your opinion doesn't count," "You are not as important to me as my work," "I don't think you're intelligent enough to make good decisions.")
- You're worried that if you do what My Partner wants (or if she keeps thinking or acting this way), you'll lose a dream or a basic need or desire that is important to you. (Example: You find yourself calling My Partner selfish for joining a golf league on weekends, but what you're really upset about is that her golf precludes trips to visit your parents, and conflicts with a dream or priority you have of wanting your children to grow up close to their grandparents.)
- You're worried about where this is going. The present situation bothers you because it may be a step toward something much worse. (Example: It's not My Partner staying out late with her friends last night that bothers you so much as your fear that she may make a habit of it—like your best buddy's wife did before their divorce.)
- It's not what My Partner wants that bothers you so much. It's that you feel criticized or dismissed, as if she is saying you're wrong just because your wants, needs, or opinions are different. (Example: Although you find yourself arguing about the fact that My Partner wants to go into the office on Saturdays, what you're really upset

about is her implication that you should be working on Saturdays, too, rather than relaxing.)

- Beneath it all, you're worried that what's happening now is similar to something bad that happened earlier in your life. (Example: It's upsetting that My Partner has stopped going with you to church, not so much because of the example she's setting for the kids, as you have argued, but because when your father stopped going to church he was also having an affair.)

Unless you are able to identify what the bigger issues are that lie beneath your reactions in the present situation, you may end up arguing over superficial things and leave the real issues unaddressed. People who are destined to succeed in their relationships look for the bigger needs, dreams, and fears at stake in any given situation.

BUILDING THE EMOTIONAL BOND

7. Being Curious about Your Partner's World

Studies suggest that a significant difference between people destined to succeed in marriage versus those destined for failure is how much they know about their partners' worlds, and how much they share with their partners about their own worlds. Researchers have known for some time that 67% of couples experience a drop in marital satisfaction after the birth of the first child, but 33% don't. What separates these two groups? One of the strongest predictors is the extent to which partners keep in touch with each other's worlds as they go through this transition. The worlds of new mothers change dramatically when a baby arrives. Husbands who enter into the new world of their wives end up in happier, more stable marriages. On the other hand, new mothers who avoid becoming so absorbed with the new baby that they lose interest in their husband's world end up in happier marriages as well.

Curiosity about one's partner's world isn't necessary only during the transition to parenthood. People who succeed in their relationships maintain curiosity about their partners throughout the course of their relationship. Studies suggest that partners who are destined to succeed are much more able to answer questions like these:

- What is My Partner looking forward to the most in the next week?
- What has My Partner done that she is most proud of lately?
- What has been most disappointing to My Partner lately?
- What compliment has My Partner received from a person other than myself recently?

- If My Partner could follow her heart right now and do one thing she otherwise wouldn't do, what would it be?

People who succeed in their relationships make it their business to know these kinds of things about their partners. Researchers say that people who succeed devote more “cognitive room” to their partners. As they go through their separate days, they spend more time thinking about what their partners might be doing, and they remember to ask about what their partners' days have been like when they are reunited.

8. *Keeping Sight of the Positive*

People destined to succeed in their relationships are more aware of the positive things that happen in their relationships, and they acknowledge them more often. For example, they acknowledge and express appreciation for the small, but often taken for granted things that their partners do each day. Taking care of the children might be just part of the agreed upon division of duties in a marriage, but when a wife has had a particularly challenging day with the kids, a husband destined to succeed will let her know that he appreciates the effort she put into the day. Similarly, even though a husband has agreed that he will accept responsibility for reading to the children each night before bed, a wife destined to succeed lets her husband know how much she appreciates his willingness to do this.

When marriages become distressed, studies show that partners underestimate the positive things that happen between them by about 50% compared to objective observers who rate the positive things that happen. Many positive things happen each day that escape the attention of those who are destined to fail in their relationships. On the other hand, people who succeed take advantage of opportunities to express appreciation. For example, a husband who is destined to succeed will notice his wife laughing on the phone, and later remember to tell her that he thinks she is a good buddy to her friends. People destined to succeed are also more likely to remember positive memories that have happened in the recent or distant past, and bring them up to enjoy again. People headed for relationship failure don't do this nearly as much.

9. *Making and Responding to Bids for Connection*

Throughout daily life, in both small and large ways, people who are destined to succeed in their relationships both make and respond to bids for connection. When their partners make observations or share information with them, they engage, showing their interest in what the other person is saying. Bids for

connection are embedded in seemingly insignificant communications. For example, a wife remarks to her husband that she's going shopping for some summer clothes. This is a small bid for the husband's attention. The husband, busy reading the paper, can respond in one of two ways. He can either engage, say by putting down the paper momentarily and asking her what kind of clothes she's looking for, or not engage, keeping his nose in the newspaper.

People who are really good at making and responding to bids initiate small connecting moves many times throughout each day. A skilled "connector" might think of something he can do to make his partner's load a little lighter, take time to initiate a plan for the both of them to do something fun, spend time thinking or learning about something important to his partner, notice an event in his day that he knows his partner would be interested in—then remember to tell her about it later, remember to ask his partner about something specific he knows will be happening in her day, ask her to do something with him (a bike ride, walk, etc.), take responsibility for making (ordering) food for her, or leave a voicemail message or an e-mail to let her know he is thinking about her. Connection making is an art, and those who are destined to succeed in their relationships learn to master it.

10. Pursuing Shared Meaning

Having a successful intimate relationship involves more than just "getting along." Roommates can get along just fine, but intimate partners who are emotionally connected have a sense that they are on a journey together. They have a shared sense of purpose, a common mission. There is a sense of loyalty and agreement to uphold their mutually agreed upon goals and values. People destined to succeed talk freely about their hopes and dreams, and encourage their partners to do the same. In small, everyday ways, they communicate to their partners, "I want to be on your team, because I think you're pretty darn cool, and I think that together, we can have a better life than I could by myself."

People who are destined to succeed look for ways to work with their partners to build a unique culture, complete with its own rituals. They don't sacrifice their own individual identities for the sake of the group, but rather try to find a way to mesh what's important to them with what's important to their partners. If their own dreams come into conflict with those of their partners, they work hard to find solutions that incorporate both of their dreams. They realize that if they squash their partners' dreams in pursuit of their own, they'll lose perhaps the most important dimension of their relationship: a sense of mutual loyalty and adventure.

The Master Aptitude

Influencing Your Moods and Attitudes

THE 10 ATTITUDES and behaviors necessary to succeed in relationships are described above. They are easy to understand and learn, but can be very difficult to do, because, at key moments, you may find yourself in a state of mind that isn't compatible with the needed behavior or attitude. In order to change your thinking or behaviors, you must learn how to get into the right frame of mind for the task. For example, marriage researchers have noticed that, when a marriage is distressed, each partner generally reacts to the other during arguments in highly predictable and patterned ways.

Thanks to some very helpful brain research since the early 1990s, we now know that this is because, across our lives, each of our brains gets conditioned to produce highly specific *response programs*. These are conditioned brain circuits that are preprogrammed so that, once triggered, they unfold as if they had a mind of their own, producing a predictable pattern of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Brain researchers call these brain states “executive operating systems” or “intrinsic motivational circuits”; in other words, “states of mind” or “moods.” The important thing is not what they are called, but to recognize that these internal response programs can dramatically dictate how you interact with My Partner.

Most of the time, it's an advantage to have these automatic, prepackaged response circuits in our brains, because when they are activated, we automatically experience motivation to learn, to love, to be close to others, to be playful, to defend and protect ourselves when needed. But when relationships are distressed, researchers have found that these automatic response circuits are often to blame. The wrong circuits get activated at critical moments, and the needed circuits remain dormant. Research on internal response circuits suggests that problems come in three varieties: (1) when you get caught in the “pull” of an internal response circuit, and are unable to do what is needed (e.g., when the “anger program” kicks in, and you just can't listen to your partner when it would ultimately be to your benefit to do so); (2) when you avoid doing or saying needed things because to do so would likely trigger an uncomfortable internal response circuit in you (e.g., when you are unable to

admit when you're wrong, because doing so triggers an anxious or vulnerable state in you); (3) when a needed response state simply doesn't show up (e.g., when you need to respond to My Partner with tenderness or caring, but you find yourself preoccupied with other things).

To improve your relationship, you will need to become familiar with the specific mood state patterns that happen inside of you during key intimate situations. Your best shot at acting differently comes when you develop the ability to shift internal states when needed. If this sounds complicated to you, don't worry. Your therapist will help you identify and learn to influence your internal states when you need to do so.

You can read more about the brain's executive operating systems and how they impact relationships in Brent Atkinson's articles, "The Emotional Imperative," "Brain to Brain," "Altered States," and "The Love Breakthrough," available at <http://www.thecouplesclinic.com> (click on "publications").

PART I

How Can You Get More
Understanding, Cooperation, and
Respect from My Partner?

CHAPTER 1

The Sequence

*Knowing How and When to Implement Each
Predictive Habit When Upsets Occur*

THIS CHAPTER BEGINS with a single-page summary of the Sequence, a powerful combination of steps that will guide you in implementing each of the habits that predict relationship success. For a more in depth understanding of each step of the Sequence, turn to the section, Understanding the Sequence (p. 23). The remaining sections of this chapter will enhance your understanding of specific steps of the Sequence. Each section is packed with important ideas for you to ponder. Take your time as you read them.

SUMMARY OF THE SEQUENCE

Knowledge of the 10 habits that predict relationship success is a critical first step, but people destined to succeed in their relationships also know *when* particular habits are needed, and *how* to use them effectively. When upsets occur, successful people combine the predictive habits into powerful movements that elicit respectfulness from their partners. Here's a step-by-step sequence for implementing the predictive habits that has been used by thousands of successful couples (the steps are described more fully below).

The First Steps

1. Self-Reminder: Do Something Different

- Remind yourself that it's in your *own best interest* to try to respond in a way that's different from your typical response. Your old way of reacting never works for anybody, in *any* relationship. If you can respond effectively in situations like these, My Partner will become more understanding and cooperative.

2. Give the Benefit of the Doubt

- Avoid jumping to conclusions, and with an open mind, ask My Partner why she acted as she did, or is thinking the way she is.
- Assume there is something at least partly legitimate about My Partner's complaint.
- Assume there must be a reason for her thinking or actions that you don't fully understand yet.
- Hear My Partner out before explaining your point of view or defending yourself.

3. Find the Understandable Part

- Become determined to find any at least partly understandable reasons for her thinking or actions, and acknowledge them.

4. What's Driving My Upset?

- Tell My Partner *why* you're upset, or tell her why you're having trouble acting or thinking the way she wants. Explain the bigger thing that's at stake for you.

5. Offer Assurance

- Assure My Partner that you're not saying that you are right and she's wrong, or assure her that you're not saying that she shouldn't be upset. Let her know that you're not saying that things have to be entirely your way.

6. Work with Me?

- Let My Partner know that you're willing to make some changes and to work with her to find a mutually acceptable solution.
-

When, in spite of my good attitude, My Partner disregards my viewpoint or criticizes me

7. Maintain Your Cool

Stay calm, and, in your mind, don't make a big deal of My Partner's initial criticism or disregarding of your viewpoint. Remind yourself that maybe she just needs an "offer and ask" reaction from you.

8. Offer and Ask

Assure My Partner that you care about how she feels, and you're willing to work with her, but also let her know that you expect that she will be willing to work with you, too (e.g., "Hey, I'm trying to work with you here, but it feels like I'm not getting it back! Will you work with me?").

9. Stand Up/Engage

If My Partner continues to criticize you or dismiss your viewpoint, let your anger build. My Partner Tell that you don't expect her to agree with you, but you do expect her to be willing to work with you. Make it clear that her attitude is not OK with you. Don't back down. Stay engaged and demand that My Partner explain why she thinks it's OK to dismiss your viewpoint.

10. Reject Your Partner

If My Partner continues to criticize or disregard you, tell her something like, "Get away from me!" or "You know what? I don't even want to be around you right now!"

11. Don't Make a Big Deal of It

When you're by yourself, let go of the anger, and feel good that you stood up well for yourself. Promise yourself that you'll do it again, if needed. Remind yourself that it's natural enough for My Partner to want to have her own way. You don't have to make a big deal of her stubborn or selfish behavior. It's not a crime that My Partner acted this way. She crossed the line, and you stood up for yourself. No biggie.

12. Try Again, Later

- "That didn't go very well, did it? You want to try again?"
 - Don't try to get her to see how "wrong" her stubborn behavior was. Don't demand an apology. Go back
-

to the First Steps again. Be ready to stand up again, if needed.

UNDERSTANDING THE SEQUENCE

THE SEQUENCE summarized above has been used by thousands of partners to elicit more understanding and cooperation from their mates. If you can follow this sequence each time an upset occurs between you and My Partner, you will find that she will become more caring and respectful of your feelings within a matter of weeks. Let's take a closer look at each step in the sequence.

The First Steps

1. Remember: Do something different

When My Partner does something that upsets you, the first thing you'll need to do is to remember to focus on making sure that you change your usual reactions, rather than dwelling on how offensive or uncaring My Partner's behavior is. Three decades of research on relationships suggests you'll be more effective in getting My Partner to understand and care about your feelings if you focus on your own reactions. Remember, studies on couples show that how people react when they feel misunderstood or offended strongly predicts whether or not they'll get treated better by their partners in the future. These are the moments that "separate the men from the boys," psychologically speaking. If you learn how to react effectively in the moments when you're upset with My Partner, the odds are excellent that you'll get more cooperation and respect from her in the future. Some ways of reacting virtually guarantee relationship failure. Remember that all people in long-term relationships feel mistreated or offended at one time or another. Those who know how to react effectively get treated better in the future. If you want to get treated better by My Partner, first make sure you're reacting to her like people who almost always get treated better. Then you can decide what to do if My Partner doesn't treat you better. However, if you develop the ability to respond effectively when you feel upset or offended, the odds are excellent that you'll soon feel more respected and understood by My Partner. The reminders on page 35 (Sample Self-Assurances) might help you remember to give attention to your own reactions before concluding that My Partner won't change. When an upset occurs between you and My Partner, try to develop the habit of instantly thinking something like this:

- My usual reactions won't work. They never work for *anybody* in *any* relationship.
- The single most effective thing I can do right now to get more of what I want from My Partner is to develop the ability to react more effectively when I'm *not* getting what I want.
- First, I'll make sure I'm thinking and acting like people who usually get respect and cooperation from their partners. Then, if I'm still not getting it, I'll figure out what else I may need to do.

2. Give the benefit of the doubt

This step draws heavily on Habit 1, Avoiding a Judgmental Attitude (p. 6)

Now that you've reminded yourself to do something different, let's focus on what you need to do. How do people who get understanding and cooperation from their partners go about getting it? There's nothing that shuts down a conversation faster than the feeling that the person you're talking to has already decided that you're guilty before even talking to you. People who are good at influencing their partners avoid jumping to negative conclusions, and try to keep an open mind when their partners do things they don't like. They understand that if they assume the worst of their partners, they'll *get* the worst. People destined for relationship success give their partners the benefit of the doubt; that is, they assume that there is an understandable reason for their partner's words or actions, even if they don't know what it is yet. Beneath even seemingly provocative behavior on the part of their partners, they assume that there is a legitimate need, priority or dream that is fueling their actions. In contrast, when people who are destined to fail in their relationships are faced with words or actions from their partners that are upsetting to them, they assume that their partners are acting this way because they have misguided priorities, reasoning, motivations, or intentions, or that their partners have faulty personality characteristics (e.g., "my partner is just lazy, controlling, irresponsible, insensitive"). Use the Attitude Check (p. 36) to help you identify judgmental explanations you might often have for My Partner's actions.

It is totally to your advantage to give the benefit of the doubt. If My Partner isn't willing to do the same, you can always stand up for yourself later (see Steps 7–12). But if you decide in the beginning that she's done something "wrong," behaved badly, or that her thinking is "off," you'll join the company of those destined to fail in their relationships. Try thinking something like,

- There are probably reasons why My Partner is thinking or acting this way that I don't yet understand.
- Even if I can't yet find a legitimate reason for her attitude or actions, I'm still going to assume there is one.
- Just because I assume there is a legitimate reason for My Partner's thinking or actions doesn't mean that I need to go along with what she wants. My viewpoints and needs are just as legitimate.

3. Find the understandable part

This step involves putting into action Habit 3, Finding the Understandable Part (p. 10).

If My Partner does something upsetting to you, you might not at first see anything understandable about her feelings or actions. However, if you can find any at least partly understandable reasons for her thinking or actions, you'll dramatically increase the odds that My Partner will be able to understand the reasons for your own feelings or viewpoints as well. People who succeed in their relationships understand that they can increase the odds that they'll get understanding if they give it first. Hence, they become

absolutely determined to understand the logic behind their partner's thoughts and actions. Because the understandable reasons for My Partner's feelings, intentions, or motivations will not always be obvious, it's to your advantage to become good at finding the reasons that are sometimes difficult to see at first. A list of possible reasons that might make My Partner's thinking or actions more understandable to you can be found under Finding the Understandable Part: Common Hidden Reasons (p. 40). Sometimes the reasons why My Partner acts or thinks differently from you may be related to the fact that she may have legitimately different priorities or ways of maintaining emotional stability than you do. They're not necessarily better than yours, but neither are they worse. Some of the most common of these core differences are summarized on p. 41.

4. What's driving your upset?

This step provides a way of implementing Habit 6, Identifying and Explaining What Is at Stake (p. 13).

Many times, if you're able to keep an open mind and try to understand the logic behind My Partner's thinking or actions, you'll find that you no longer have a problem with what she wants. However, there are other times when you'll still find that you see things differently, or that you have different priorities or expectations. In these situations, you'll need to explain why you feel the way you do. You'll be most effective if you can identify the bigger needs or worries that drive your feelings about the particular situation, then explain them.

Arguments often fail because couples argue about the wrong things. People who are destined to succeed in their relationships realize that the reasons they are upset or have trouble doing what their partners want sometimes run deeper than the present situation. Often, there is something bigger at stake. Your ability to explain the underlying reasons for being upset will help My Partner become more cooperative and understanding. At some point during an argument people destined for success pause and take the conversation to a different level, saying something like, "OK, I think I just figured out why this bothers me so much . . . I'm worried that . . ." (see p. 42 for a list of underlying needs that often drive the feelings and actions of people in specific situations). Are any of these needs driving your upset feelings in the current situation? Unless you are able to identify what the bigger issues are that lie beneath your reactions in the present situation, you may end up arguing over superficial things and leave the real issues unaddressed. Try asking yourself the following questions:

- Why is this such a big deal to me? Underneath it all, what's at stake for me?
- What am I worried about?
- Is this really about the present situation, or is there something bigger at stake?

5. Offer assurance

This step draws upon Habit 1, Avoiding a Judgmental Attitude (p. 6) and Habit 5, Offering Assurance (p. 12).

You may find that when you talk to My Partner about a dissatisfaction you have, even though you're not feeling critical of her, she may react defensively as if you've criticized her. Not realizing that her defensiveness is a reaction to feeling attacked, you might think that she's just being stubborn. There's a simple way to remedy this situation: Begin with the assumption that she's being defensive or dismissive of your feelings because she feels criticized or attacked, not because she's being uncooperative. Don't make a big deal of the fact that she has misinterpreted you, simply say things to her that will help her understand that you're not feeling critical of her. For example, you might say something like this:

- I'm not saying that it was wrong for you to do that. It's just different from what I was hoping for (or, I just don't think I understand why you did it).
- I'm not saying that we have to do things the way I think they should be, I think your feelings should count too. I'm just trying to understand them.
- Look, I care about your feelings here too, and I'm going to respect them *even if I don't agree.*

People destined for relationship success learn the following general rule: *When your partner seems critical or defensive, don't make a big deal of it, just offer an assurance.*

If My Partner accuses you of having a critical "tone" or "attitude" or criticizes the way you're talking to her, resist the urge to debate whether or not her perceptions are valid. Assume that there may be at least some truth in what she's feeling. No big deal. Just start over again, and this time be sure to add assurances that explicitly let her know you're willing to keep an open mind and be cooperative. For example, say something like this:

- OK, it's certainly possible that there's a part of me that wants to be critical of you, because I am upset, but I'm trying to keep an open mind.

If you realize that you do feel critical, you can say something like this:

- OK, maybe I am being critical, but that's not fair. I'm sure there are reasons why you did what you did that I probably just don't understand yet. Will you just talk to me about them?

If My Partner's defensiveness or dismissive attitude continues in spite of your assurance that you're trying to keep an open mind, and you're willing to try to understand and respect her feelings too, you'll need to move on to Step 7 below and stand up firmly for yourself. But most of the time you'll likely find that if you avoid getting all indignant about her initial defensiveness and just assure her that you're trying to approach the conversation with an open mind, she'll become more cooperative.

6. Work with me?

With this step, you'll begin to implement both Habit 4, Giving Equal Regard (p. 11) and Habit 2, Standing Up for Yourself without Putting Your Partner Down (p. 8).

Dropping the idea that My Partner is wrong doesn't mean that you have to give in. People who are destined to succeed in their relationships believe that their own opinions and expectations are just as important as those of their partners.

Rather than criticizing or trying to prove their partners wrong, people who are destined to succeed in their relationships simply ask their partners to "move over and make room for me." They ask their partners to meet them half way. Ideally, when you and My Partner have a difference of opinion, you'll refrain from assuming that you're right and she's wrong, keep an open mind, and become determined to understand her viewpoint or the logic behind her actions. If you do this, you might actually find that you agree with My Partner. However, if you still have a different viewpoint, you'll need to explain the logic behind your feelings, too, and try to help her understand the underlying needs or worries that drive your feelings on the issue. In the end, however, the two of you may still have different feelings on the issue. People destined to succeed show regard for their partner's feelings, and are willing to work toward solutions that take both of their feelings into account. They simply ask the same of their partners. When people stop criticizing their partners or trying to prove them wrong, and instead simply ask their partners to work toward a compromise, they usually find that their partners are willing.

If, after giving the benefit of the doubt, finding and acknowledging the understandable reasons for My Partner's feelings, offering assurances and explaining why you feel the way you do, you find that you and My Partner still disagree, try saying something like this:

- OK, I guess we feel differently about this. Will you work with me? Maybe we can figure out a way of doing things that takes both of our feelings into account.

When, in spite of your good attitude, your partner disregards your viewpoint or criticizes you

The first steps (described above) provide the soil from which increased respect and cooperation will emerge from My Partner. Many arguments can be avoided through the first steps alone. However, there are also times in the course of most relationships when further measures are necessary. Steps 7 and 8, and possibly Steps 9 to 12 are needed in two situations:

A. If My Partner criticizes or attacks you. If My Partner is upset with you, she'll either complain to you, or criticize you. If she complains, she'll simply tell you she's upset or dissatisfied with something, and she'll probably also tell you why, and what she wants. If she criticizes you, My Partner will go beyond complaining and imply that your viewpoint or actions are *wrong*, and hers are *right*, or she'll imply that you've behaved badly. As a general rule, when she is complaining, your most effective responses will always involve the First Steps summarized above (p. 22). However, if My Partner is criticizing you, the First Steps may actually be counterproductive. If My Partner criticizes you, it will feel like an attack. She may seem disgusted, and show no interest in hearing your point of

view. If you respond in an understanding way when My Partner is in “attack mode,” you’ll make it more likely that she’ll resort to attacking in the future when she gets upset with you. It does no good to persist in attempts to be reasonable with someone who isn’t willing or able to be reasonable with you. When you feel attacked, skip over the first steps temporarily and begin with Step 7. Return to the first steps only when My Partner stops criticizing you and simply begins explaining why she’s upset.

- B. If My Partner disregards your viewpoint.** These are situations in which you avoid criticizing her and instead ask her to move over and make room for you, but she won’t! In spite of your most sincere attempts to explain your point of view without criticism or contempt, recognize and acknowledge the reasonable part of My Partner’s argument, listen nondefensively, and assure her that you are not as rigid as you may seem on the issue, she isn’t willing to give your feelings equal consideration.

7. Maintain your cool

This step requires the implementation of Habit 1, Avoiding a Judgmental Attitude, and confidence that you can eventually implement Habit 2, Standing Up for Yourself without Putting Your Partner Down, if necessary (pp. 6–8).

If you’re implementing this step, it’s either because My Partner is criticizing you, or because she continues to be unwilling to work with you in spite of your noncritical, cooperative attitude. A huge difference between those destined to succeed in their relationships and those destined to fail has to do with how indignant they get about their partner’s objectionable behavior. People destined to succeed realize it’s still too early to get all bent out of shape. They don’t see their partner’s temporary attack or stubbornness as a big crime, and hence, they don’t make a federal case out of it. They realize that all of us can become uncooperative or disrespectful at times, and they know that just because their partners are treating them poorly in the moment doesn’t mean that they will continue to do so. They are confident that if their partners continue to disregard or criticize them, they will stand up firmly for themselves in just a moment. But first, they’ll make it as easy as possible for their partners to shift their attitudes. They do this by avoiding a judgmental attitude (Habit 1, p. 6).

When it feels as though My Partner is attacking or disregarding you, try saying the following to yourself:

- It’s no big deal that My Partner is acting this way. It doesn’t make her an awful person. (It *will* be a big deal if she keeps on acting this way after I do the Offer and Ask thing in just a minute, but at this point, it’s no big deal.)
- She’s treating me poorly now, but I can stand up firmly for myself in a minute. First I’ll make it as easy as possible for her to change his attitude.

8. Offer and ask

With this step, you’ll implement several habits at the same time. For example, it requires that you maintain a nonjudgmental attitude (Habit 1, p. 6), begin

standing up for yourself without putting your partner down (Habit 2, p. 8), give equal regard (Habit 4, p. 11), and offer assurance (Habit 5, p. 12).

In this step, you ask My Partner to become more cooperative and assure her of your willingness to do the same. For example, if she's criticizing you, you might say something like this:

- Hey, I'm willing to listen to you, but I'm having a hard time because it feels like you've already decided that I'm wrong. Could you slow down a bit and just tell me why you're upset?
- I'm sure that there are valid reasons why you're upset. I'm just having a hard time listening because I feel like you're starting with the assumption that I'm guilty before we even talk!

If My Partner is putting you down, you might say something like this:

- Hey! You have my attention. You don't have to talk to me like that!

If My Partner is being stubborn or uncooperative in spite of your attempts to cooperate with her, you might say something like this:

- Hey, I'm trying to work with you here, but it feels like I'm not getting it back! Will you work with me?

In the "offer and ask" step, you *offer* assurance ("I'm willing to listen; I'm not saying that things have to be entirely my way; I'm not saying that I'm right and you're wrong; I care about how you feel too, and I'm willing to work with you," etc.), and you *ask* her to be willing to do the same ("Will you work with me? Will you stop criticizing me and just tell me what's bothering you?").

To be effective, the "offer and ask" step must be made calmly but firmly. Usually, when people take this step, there's some frustration in their voices, but it's also clear that they're still able to be respectful. They make it clear that they're still willing to try to maintain a cooperative attitude, but only if their partners are ready to be cooperative in return. When implemented well, this step has the tone of a "friendly warning shot" fired into the air. It should have the effect of getting My Partner's attention, but also make it clear that you're still willing to try to be understanding and work together. With it, you'll communicate something like, "You're beginning to piss me off, but I'll try to stay calm if you can just give me some indication that you're willing to work with me here!"

9. Stand up/engage

With this step, you continue to put Habit 2 into action, Standing Up for Yourself without Putting Your Partner Down (pp. 8–10).

Once you've taken the Offer and Ask step, you'll often find that My Partner shifts to a less critical or more cooperative attitude. If she does, simply return to the first steps (e.g., explain your point of view without criticism or contempt, recognize and acknowledge the reasonable part of My Partner's argument,

listen nondefensively, and assure her that you are not as rigid as you may seem on the issue). However, it's possible that, in spite of your good attitude and assurances, My Partner will continue to criticize you or refuse to recognize any validity in your feelings. If this is the case, you'll need to allow your anger to surface, and let her know in no uncertain terms that her attitude is not acceptable. If My Partner is putting you down, you might say something like this:

- Who do you think you are—talking to me like that?
I don't care how valid your point is—I'm not going to put up with this crap!

If My Partner is refusing to recognize any validity in your viewpoint, you might say something like this:

- Look, I don't expect you to agree with me, but I do expect you to be willing to work with me. My viewpoint is just as valid as yours here. Who in hell do you think you are?

It's really important to note that successful partners “return hostile fire” only when their mates reject their “offer and ask” steps. Many people skip over “offer and ask,” and immediately unleash their anger. *This is a huge mistake.* If you blast My Partner every time she becomes critical or stubborn without “firing a warning shot,” she'll feel unfairly assaulted by you, and she'll probably become even more uncooperative over time. On the other hand, if My Partner rejects your good attitude and criticizes you or stubbornly refuses to “work with you,” somewhere inside she'll know that your anger is justified, even if she can't recognize or admit it at the moment.

Some people find it confusing when their therapists encourage them to vent their anger at their partners. Don't relationships already have too much anger? Aren't we supposed to become less angry? Yes, too much anger is indeed toxic in relationships. If you become angry at My Partner every time you don't like what she does, you're unlikely to get the kind of understanding and respect from her that you'd like to have. However, there are also times when anger is not only justified, it's necessary. If you avoid anger at moments that call for anger, your relationship will likely fail. So what is the difference between the moments when anger is needed and when it's counterproductive? The answer is relatively simple:

When you've made a good faith effort to assure My Partner of your willingness to assume a cooperative attitude, and she just keeps on attacking you or is unwilling to give an inch, you need to get angry. In most other situations, your anger will probably do more harm than good.

Often, we hear clients say that they won't engage in an angry exchange because they don't want to “stoop” to their partner's level. They think of themselves as “better” in some sense than their partners. The problem is that this attitude (I'm more mature than my partner) is the single most toxic element in relationships identified by researchers thus far. Technically, it's a form of contempt. It's almost impossible for you to avoid contempt in the face

of an attack, unless you become angry and defend yourself at the moment of the attack. We find that those who can angrily defend themselves are better able to assume noncontemptuous attitudes in the aftermath of an attack than those who disengage when attacked. A bit of good old-fashioned verbal scuffling is much less damaging than refusing to fight and then looking down on your partner. If you become silent and “stonewall” when you feel criticized or disregarded by My Partner, she’ll likely hear you saying, “I’m not even going to waste my time trying to talk with you. You are too disgusting or scary or irrational to even deal with.”

Relationships that have been stuck for years in an attack–withdraw pattern change dramatically when typically withdrawing partners develop the ability to square off with their mates, provided that they can avoid making a big deal out of how awful their partners are for “picking fights” (see Step 11 below).

10. Reject your partner

With this step, you take Habit 2, Standing Up for Yourself without Putting Your Partner Down to its most forceful level (pp. 8–10).

If the anger you unleash has been preceded by good faith efforts on your part, it may have the effect of “snapping My Partner out of it.” She may get a grip and begin working more cooperatively with you; however, she might not. She might respond with her own anger. If she does, don’t back down. Engage in a heated exchange for a while. Demand to know why on earth she thinks that she could possibly be smarter or better than you. Make it clear that her know-it-all attitude infuriates you. The most effective people in relationships are no more afraid of relationship discord than their partners are, and are able to “pitch a fit” when the situation calls for it. When faced with an attack from My Partner, the most effective response is to (a) assure her that you’re willing to listen; (b) ask her to stop attacking you; (c) “let her have it” if she continues to attack or disrespect your feelings; (d) refrain from making a big deal of her offensive behavior; and (e) be willing to again talk about the subject you were fighting about with an open mind.

At any point, if her attitude softens even a little, return to the first steps. However, if five minutes of heated argument result in no change in her attitude, you’ll probably need to say something like this:

- You know what? I don’t even want to be near you right now. Get away from me!

If she won’t get away from you, get away from her! Go to another part of the house. Leave temporarily. Remember, rejecting your partner is a strong and provocative move, and should be reserved only for situations in which My Partner continues to attack or utterly disregard your feelings in spite of your efforts to be collaborative.

11. Don’t make a big deal of it

This step requires a strong ability to implement Habit 1, Avoiding a Judgmental Attitude (p. 6).

If you've progressed all the way through Step 10, you're pretty angry. Now it's time to calm down. People destined to succeed become angry and stand up firmly for themselves, then they let it go. They don't make a fuss about the fact that they had to stand up. To them, it's not the end of the world when their partners act in ways that require them to get angry and growl back. "Standing up" is all in a day's work. In contrast, in the aftermath of an argument people destined to fail become consumed with thoughts like, "She is a monster!" "She's the most selfish person in the world!" "She's a control freak!" "She's verbally abusive!"

After a situation in which you got angry and stood up for yourself, try adopting the attitude reflected in the following thoughts:

- It's not a crime that I had to stand up and put her in his place. It doesn't make her a bad person.
- It's natural enough for her to want to have her own way. I don't blame her.
- It doesn't have to be a big deal. She stepped over the line—I let her have it. No biggie. I'll do it again if necessary!
- She probably only does this as often as she does because I haven't known how to stand up for myself in the past without making a big deal of it.

12. Try again, later

This step draws most heavily on Habits 1, 4, and 5 (Avoiding a Judgmental Attitude, Giving Equal Regard, and Offering Assurance).

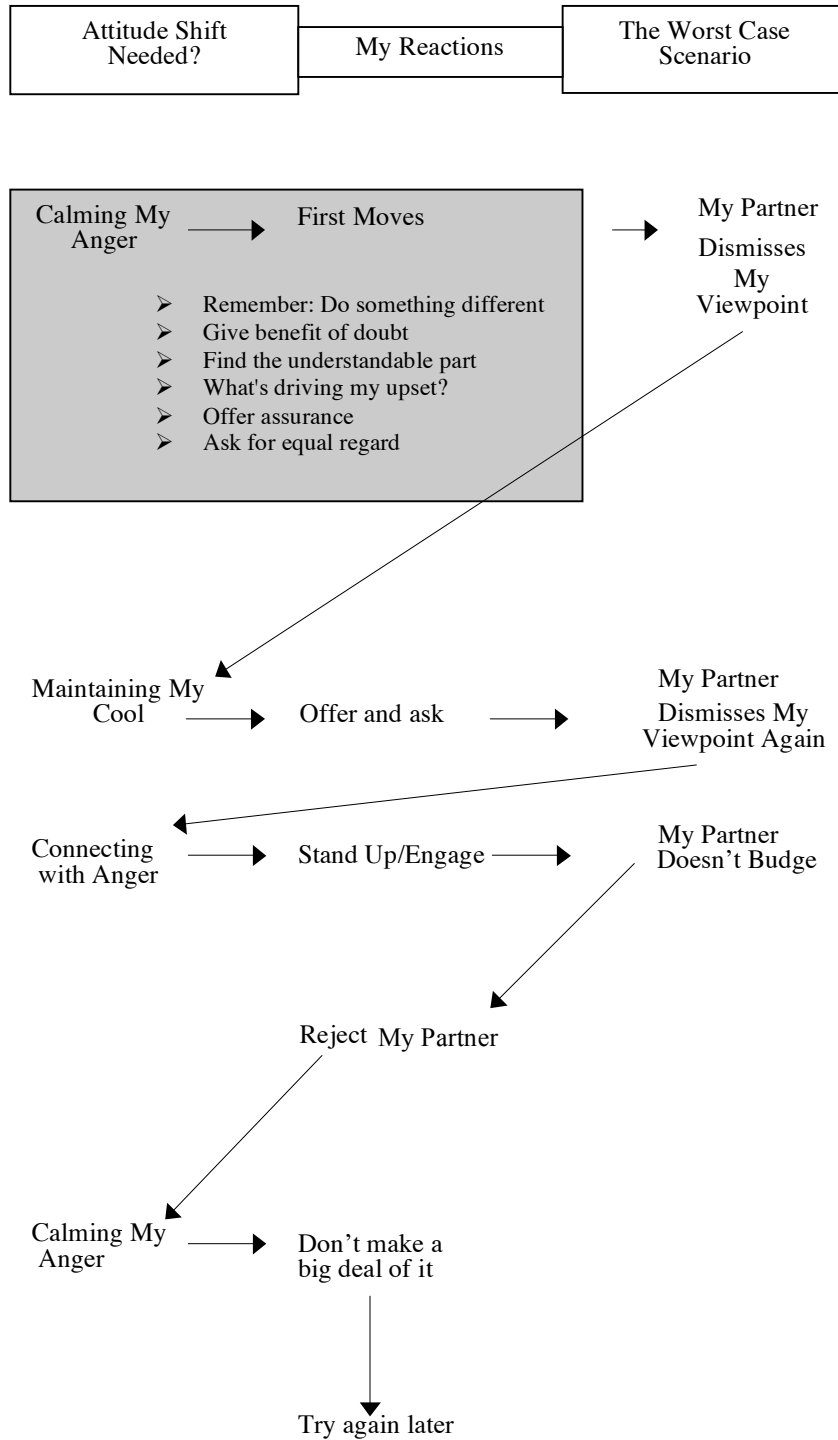
Just because you don't make a big deal of My Partner's offensive behavior doesn't mean that you're going to just forget about it and move on. Nope. The issue didn't get resolved. People who succeed in their relationships don't settle for situations in which they don't feel that their feelings are given equal consideration. You'll need to approach My Partner again, but do it in a good way. Don't demand an apology. Don't get her to see how awful her offensive behavior was. Instead, just ask her to talk to you about the subject again. Be willing to compromise and ask My Partner to do the same.

Often, attempts to reprocess arguments get off track because couples end up arguing about how they argued the first time (e.g., "You had no right to talk to me like that!" "You implied that my viewpoint was stupid!"). Resist the temptation to do this. Instead, go back to the issue you were arguing about, and try to talk about it again. Use the first steps (explain your point of view without criticism or contempt, recognize and acknowledge the reasonable part of My Partner's argument, listen nondefensively, and assure her that you are not as rigid as you may seem on the issue). If My Partner reacts defensively, offer assurances. If she continues to be defensive or critical, maintain your cool and go to the Offer and Ask step. If necessary, get angry and stand up for yourself all over again, then refrain from making a big deal of it. Try again later. Be willing to go through the whole process as many times as may be necessary. If you develop the ability to stay with this process, My Partner will become more understanding and cooperative over time.

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SEQUENCE

1. Start with the First Steps (1–6), and go to Steps 7 to 12 only if My Partner disregards or criticizes you.
2. The First Steps need not be implemented strictly in the sequence suggested in the chart. However, the suggested sequence is highly effective and a good plan to begin with.
3. If My Partner criticizes or dismisses your viewpoint, do not continue with the First Steps. Instead, go directly to Steps 7 and 8 (Maintain Your Cool, and Offer and Ask).
4. If My Partner still continues to dismiss or criticize you, proceed to Steps 9 and 10 (Stand Up/Engage and Reject Your Partner).
5. Whenever My Partner stops criticizing or dismissing you, return immediately to the First Steps.
6. While Steps 9 and 10 (Stand Up/Engage and Reject Your Partner) are absolutely essential in situations where, in spite of your good attitude, My Partner continues to disregard or criticize you, they can cause more harm than good unless they are followed by Steps 11 and 12 (Don't Make a Big Deal of It and Try Again, Later). *Whenever you implement Steps 9 and 10, be sure that you follow through with 11 and 12.*

Flow Chart: Ordering of the Sequence



SAMPLE SELF-REMINDERS

This page will help with Step 1 of the Sequence (Remember: Do Something Different, p. 23).

When I'm upset with My Partner first	When My Partner is upset with me first
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You deserve to be listened to. Don't make it harder for her to hear you! • Be smart! She can't help being defensive if she feels attacked. • Don't worry, she'll start caring more about how you feel if you are able to react well in this kind of situation. • Just because you approach her with a less critical attitude doesn't mean that you have to be OK with her thinking or actions. • It won't cost you a thing to relax and adjust your attitude before you talk to her. • You want her to stop doing that, right? You have the power to influence her, but not if you react the way you usually do. • You're going to feel better if you handle this like the people in those studies who are destined to succeed in relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just relax! You can afford to hear her out. You've got plenty of time to stand up for yourself later, if need be. Make sure you really understand her first. • Don't worry, she won't be upset with you like this nearly as much in the future if you are able to react well in this kind of situation now. • Just because you try to respond to her with an understanding attitude doesn't mean that you have to give in. You can try to see things from her point of view and still stand up for yourself later, if need be. • Just because she's upset doesn't mean you did anything wrong. It just means she had a different expectation or priority than you. It's natural for people to get upset when they don't get what they really want. • You want her to stop getting so upset with you, right? You have the power to make a difference here. • You're going to feel better if you handle this like the people in those studies who are destined to succeed in relationships.

ATTITUDE CHECK

This page will help you with Step 2 of the Sequence (Give the Benefit of the Doubt, p. 24).

The first step toward being able to stand up for yourself without putting My Partner down is to get real honest with yourself about the “put-downs” that automatically arise in your head when My Partner does or says something you don’t like. Think about the thing you are upset with My Partner about right now. Complete one of the following sentences by circling which of the eight descriptions of My Partner (below) that seem fitting.

“What My Partner did was . . .”

or

“The way My Partner was thinking was . . .”

	Selfish / Inconsiderate	Foolish / Misguided	Over-Reacting	Judgmental	Manipulative / Deceptive	Controlling	Defensive	Unfeeling
<p><input type="checkbox"/> She acted this way because she is so</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lazy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Irresponsible</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Undisciplined</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Insensitive</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Inconsiderate</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Selfish</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “I would never do that!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She is incapable of thinking about anyone but herself!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She always has to do things her way.”</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> “I can’t believe she can’t see how stupid (short-sighted, self-defeating) that was!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “How could she possibly think that way?”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “That’s irrational!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “I’m in a relationship with someone who can’t think things through!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She is so shallow!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She can’t see the bigger picture!”</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> “I can’t believe how upset she’s getting over such a small thing!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She blows everything out of proportion!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “Does everything have to be such a stinking ordeal?”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “I can’t believe that, after all the things I do well, she chooses the one thing I don’t and obsesses about it.”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She is just a negative person!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She’s not satisfied unless she has something to be upset about!”</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> “She is so arrogant!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “What’s the point in even talking to somebody who thinks she knows everything?”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She always finds a way to turn things around to look like I’m in the wrong.”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She thinks she’s better (smarter) than everybody else!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “Everything is black and white for her!”</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> “She is just mean!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “This woman is a sociopath!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She has no conscience!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She is a cold-hearted, calculating manipulator!”</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> “She won’t be satisfied unless she has her own way.”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “What’s the point in even talking to her? She’s already got her mind made up.”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She’s just a control freak!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She never considers asking me what I’d like, she just plows ahead and makes decisions.”</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> “There’s no talking to her!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “Why do I even bother? She can’t ever admit that she’s wrong!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She is incapable of apologizing!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She’s got a rationalization for everything!”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She doesn’t even care what the truth is. She has already decided that!”</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> “I could be sitting over here devastated, and she wouldn’t even care.”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “I feel all the pain, and she feels nothing.”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> “She’s incapable of feeling bad about hurting me.”</p>	

DEVELOPING NON-JUDGMENTAL EXPLANATIONS FOR MY PARTNER'S ATTITUDE OR ACTIONS

This section will help you with Steps 2 and 3 of the Sequence, Give the Benefit of the Doubt and Find the Understandable Part (pp. 24–25).

If you have thoughts about your partner like the one's listed on page 36 enough times, you may begin thinking of My Partner's personality in globally negative ways. For example, you may begin thinking things like, "My Partner is just a lazy person," (or "she's just plain inconsiderate, selfish, controlling, negative, critical," etc.) These kinds of global negative thoughts about one's partner are the kiss of death to relationships. If you begin thinking about My Partner in this way, you'll bring out the absolute worst in her. She'll feel like you've lost faith in her, and that you're no longer on the same team. In fact, you'll have positioned yourself as the enemy.

If you hold negative explanations for My Partner's actions, it's probably not because you deliberately set out to think of her this way. It's likely that you have come by these negative explanations honestly. To you, it may simply seem like the facts. Regardless of whether you've begun thinking of My Partner in global negative terms or you just find yourself thinking negatively about her on specific occasions, the pathway to getting more respect and understanding from her involves finding a way to lose the judgmental or superior attitude, while standing up for yourself at the same time. There are three ways you can do this. First, you can find the legitimate motivations that drive My Partner's upsetting behavior. Second, you can recognize ways in which it's likely that your own attitude and actions have unintentionally fueled the very attitude and actions in My Partner that you have found upsetting. Third, you can recognize how your own contributions to your relationship problems have been as serious as My Partner's.

*Find the Legitimate Motivations that Drive My Partner's
Thinking or Actions*

If you're open to finding them, there are always legitimate motivations that drive My Partner's attitudes or actions, even if you don't feel it justifies them. You may be reluctant to try to find and acknowledge these motivations, because you're afraid that it will fuel My Partner's tendency to think she's right and you're wrong. But the evidence from relationship studies contradicts this assumption. It's the inability or unwillingness to acknowledge the legitimate priorities or motivations of one's partner that fuels defensiveness and stubbornness. People who are most successful in relationships know that if they assume the worst of their partners, they'll get the worst. Instead, they find and acknowledge the legitimate priorities and motivations that drive their

partner's attitudes and actions, *and they also stand up for their own*. Influential people in relationships combine a generous attitude toward their partners with an unwillingness to allow their own feelings or priorities to be dismissed. Successful people require that their feelings and opinions be given equal consideration, and they make it very easy for their partners to do so. How? By assuming the best of their partners. Consider the following:

1. **Beneath My Partner's seemingly inexplicable or provocative behavior, there's something legitimate that she's going after.** There's something bigger at stake for My Partner than is immediately apparent. There's a legitimate need, dream or priority that My Partner is trying to preserve or obtain. This need, priority or dream is probably one that isn't as important to you, but that doesn't make it wrong or misguided.
2. **My Partner's actions are crucial to her way of feeling stable.** My Partner has a different way of coping in life than you do. For example, some people feel better when they operate more independently while others feel better working as a team; some feel better with a work first/play later approach while others feel better if they play along the way; some feel better when life is orderly and predictable, while others feel stifled or suffocated by the same conditions. Review each of these core differences on page 41. Maybe My Partner's seemingly provocative or inexplicable behavior is related to one of these legitimate differences that the two of you have.

*Recognize the Ways that You Have Unintentionally
Fueled My Partner's Upsetting Attitude or Actions*

People who are most successful in influencing their partners recognize that their own shortcomings are as serious as those of their partners. In fact, their own shortcomings often *fuel* those of their partners. My Partner's attitude or actions may be part of a vicious circle in which she is reacting to the worst in you as much as you react to the worst in her.

3. **My Partner's attitude or actions are partly a reaction to feeling dismissed or "written off" by you.** Has My Partner's attitude or actions gotten worse over time? If so, it's likely because she feels that you've "turned" on her and "joined the other team." She knows that you've written her off as hopeless in some ways, and this has made her reactions to you more extreme or provocative. When people get branded by their partners as hopeless, it's almost impossible for them to change, because doing so would feel like admitting that their partners were "right" and they were "wrong" all along.
4. **My Partner's attitude or actions are partly due to your inability to stand up for yourself without putting her down.** When people

who are destined for relationship success feel mistreated or misunderstood by their partners, they stand up firmly for themselves *without making a big deal of their partner's selfish or controlling attitude*. Evidence from relationship studies suggests that if you don't have this ability, it's unlikely that your relationship will succeed, regardless of who your partner is. This ability has two parts: 1) You must be willing to stand firm and refuse to allow yourself to be disregarded or taken advantage of, and 2) You must be able to do this without making a big deal of how seemingly bad your partner is behaving. This two-part ability is every bit as necessary for relationship success as is the ability to refrain from being selfish or controlling. Chances are that if you had enough of this ability, you'd be getting much more cooperation and/or understanding from My Partner by now. Before you conclude that My Partner's attitude or actions are due to inherent personality flaws, consider that they persist at least partly because she's in a relationship with someone who hasn't developed sufficient ability to stand up for himself without putting her down.

- 5. My Partner's attitude or actions are partly due to her feeling that you just don't like her very much lately (or her feeling that you don't care about her feelings).** If you have become at least somewhat emotionally distant or emotionally reserved toward My Partner, she may not feel the kind of tender and connected feelings from you that are normally needed to nourish relationships. Her uncooperative or critical attitude may be at least partly due to feeling that you don't like her very much.

*Recognize that Your Own Transgressions Have Been
Just as Detrimental to the Relationship as My Partner's.*

- 6. Some of My Partner's actions may have been wrong, but no more wrong than some of your own.** You may be ranking My Partner's transgressions as more serious than your own. But relationship studies suggest that many subtle, non-provocative habits can undermine relationships just as surely as the more blatant ones.

Remember, just because you recognize that your shortcomings may contribute to your relationship problems just as much as My Partner's doesn't mean that you must accept her attitude or actions. It just means that you don't have grounds to feel superior, and that she has just as much right to ask you to change as you do to ask her. In the best relationships, partners avoid assuming judgmental attitudes, and instead of criticizing each other, they respect their differences and work toward compromises that take both of their values, priorities or preferences into account.

FINDING THE UNDERSTANDABLE PART: COMMON “HIDDEN” REASONS

*This page will help you with Step 3 of the Sequence
(Find the Understandable Part, pp. 24–25).*

Because the understandable reasons for My Partner’s feelings, intentions or motivations will not always be obvious, it’s to your advantage to become good at finding the reasons that are sometimes difficult to see at first. Here’s a list of possible reasons that might make My Partner’s thinking or actions more understandable to you:

1. Maybe My Partner didn’t realize how important the issue is to you.
2. Maybe My Partner was having a bad day.
3. Maybe My Partner had a lot on her mind.
4. Maybe My Partner didn’t have all the facts.
5. Maybe My Partner was acting this way because she felt mad at you about something else.
6. Maybe My Partner was operating on different assumptions or information than you.
7. Maybe My Partner was reading something between the lines that you didn’t intend to be saying.
8. Maybe you were reading something between the lines that My Partner didn’t intend to be saying.
9. Maybe the issue was more important to My Partner than you previously understood.
10. Maybe My Partner wasn’t upset so much about this particular situation as she was about where she feared things might be headed.
11. Maybe My Partner felt threatened by you in a way that you didn’t understand.
12. Maybe My Partner was afraid she was going to lose something very important to her if she did things the way you wanted.
13. My Partner’s actions are crucial to her way of feeling stable. Maybe My Partner would feel anxious or unstable if she tried doing things your way. Maybe My Partner has a different way of coping in life than you do.
14. Maybe My Partner just has really different priorities or expectations than you do. Maybe she was acting perfectly consistently with her priorities. You just don’t like it because they are different than yours, but that doesn’t make them *wrong*. (See: *Core Differences in Ways of Maintaining Emotional Stability*, p. 41)
15. Maybe beneath My Partner’s seemingly inexplicable or provocative behavior, there’s something legitimate that she’s going after. There’s something bigger at stake for My Partner than is immediately apparent. There’s a legitimate need, dream or priority that My Partner is trying to preserve or obtain (see *What’s Driving You?*, page 42). This need, priority, or dream probably isn’t as important to you, but that doesn’t make it wrong.
16. Maybe My Partner’s actions or attitude are a reaction to feeling dismissed or “written off” by you (see *Developing Non-Judgmental Explanations for My Partner’s Attitude or Actions*, pp. 37–39).
17. Maybe My Partner’s actions or attitude are partly due to your inability to stand up for yourself without putting her down in the past (see *Developing Non-Judgmental Explanations for My Partner’s Attitude or Actions*, pp. 37–39).
18. Maybe My Partner’s uncooperative or critical attitude is partly due to her feeling that you just don’t like her very much lately, or her feeling that you don’t care about her feelings (see *Developing Non-Judgmental Explanations for My Partner’s Attitude or Actions*, pp. 37–39).

CORE DIFFERENCES IN WAYS OF MAINTAINING EMOTIONAL STABILITY

(Legitimately Different Ways of Navigating Life)

*This page will help you with Step 3 of the Sequence
(Find the Understandable Part, pp. 24–25).*

1 Independence vs. Togetherness	Independence First <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often prefer to engage in activities and tasks independently Rather than assuming responsibility for anticipating each other’s needs, each partner expects the other to speak up when they need something. <p><i>Dream:</i> Freedom. Not being responsible for someone else’s happiness. <i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> I’ll spend my whole life meeting my partner’s needs, when she could take care of them herself. <i>Critical Stance:</i> You want me to read your mind! You expect too much! You’re too needy! You want me to do things for you that you’re perfectly capable of doing for yourself! You’re too needy!</p>	Togetherness First <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often prefer to engage in activities and tasks together. Each partner anticipates the needs of the other, and attempts to meet them without having to be asked. <p><i>Dream:</i> Companionship. That my partner would take my feelings into consideration without my demanding it. <i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> I’ll feel like I’m in this world alone. There will be nobody looking out for me but myself. <i>Critical Stance:</i> You live in your own little world! You’re self-centered (or selfish)! Any moron would have realized that I needed help. I shouldn’t have to ask!</p>
2 Present vs. Future Orientation	Invest in the Future First <p>Delay gratification. Work first, then play. <i>Dream:</i> To share a secure future together. <i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> If we goof around along the way, we may invest inadequately in our future happiness. <i>Critical Stance:</i> You’re lazy! You’re irresponsible! You’re like a child who has to have everything right now!</p>	Live for the Moment First <p>Invest in the future, but not at the expense of enjoying the present. <i>Dream:</i> To have a life where you enjoy each moment. <i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> What’s the point, if you don’t enjoy life along the way? There will always be more work. <i>Critical Stance:</i> You’re anal, neurotic, anxious, etc.</p>
3 Degree of Structure	Predictability First <p>Seek security, predictability and order first, then experiment within the safe parameters. <i>Dream:</i> To have a safety net so that life feels more stable, less anxiety-provoking. <i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> Life will be out of control. <i>Critical Stance:</i> You’re reckless!</p>	Spontaneity First <p>Be more structured only if a more spontaneous approach fails. <i>Dream:</i> To avoid boredom. Life as an adventure! <i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> Life will be dull and meaningless. <i>Critical Stance:</i> You’re boring! You’re a coward!</p>
4 First Reaction to Things You Don’t Like	Slow to Upset <p>Getting upset doesn’t help anything. Don’t make a big deal of things. It’s not the end of the world if everything doesn’t go the way you wanted it to. <i>Dream:</i> Peace and harmony <i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> That life will become a never-ending series of upsets. <i>Critical Stance:</i> You are never satisfied! You’re a negative person. You’re not happy unless you have something to be upset about!</p>	Readily Upset <p>It’s normal to feel upset when something seems wrong, deficient or less than it should be. If nobody gets upset, nothing ever changes. <i>Dream:</i> Justice and quality <i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> That I’ll have to settle for things that don’t seem right to me. <i>Critical Stance:</i> You’re detached, unfeeling, and conflict avoidant. You don’t care enough to fight.</p>
5 Resolving Upset Feelings	Problem Solving First <p>Feel better by solving the problem or making a plan. <i>Dream:</i> To have a partner who lets by-gones be by-gones—who has a positive attitude toward life. <i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> I don’t want to “fuel the fire” by giving her negative feelings too much attention. <i>Critical Stance:</i> You’re a hopelessly negative person, a whiner, a victim. Stop feeling sorry for yourself and get over it. Either do something about it or get over it!</p>	Understanding First <p>Feel better by feeling understood. <i>Dream:</i> For someone to understand what its like to be me. To avoid loneliness. <i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> If you let go of upset feelings before feeling understood, you will never feel understood. You’ll just fix things on the surface. <i>Critical Stance:</i> You could care less about how I feel. You just want to pretend the whole thing never happened!</p>

WHAT'S DRIVING YOU?

*This page will help you with Step 4 of the Sequence.
(What's Driving My Upset? p. 25).*

People who are destined to succeed in their relationships realize that the reasons why they feel or act as they do often run deeper than the present situation. Often, it's not the situation so much as what it symbolizes. There's something bigger at stake—an underlying need, fear, dream, or priority. Examples of underlying needs that often drive the feelings and actions of people in specific situations:

- To feel competent
- To feel loved and accepted
- To feel admired
- To feel respected
- To feel extra special to somebody
- To have free time
- To be able to relax and not have to work so hard
- To feel taken care of
- To feel that someone thinks they're fortunate to have me as their friend.
- To feel secure
- To feel useful to somebody else
- To *not* feel taken advantage of, or taken for granted
- To feel I can influence my future
- To feel attractive
- To feel that someone cares enough to make a sacrifice for me
- To feel free to go with my intuitions
- To feel like I'm growing
- To get revenge
- To enforce justice
- To feel that life is predictable
- To feel that life is an adventure
- To *not* feel bored
- To feel creative
- To feel well-organized
- To feel productive
- To feel able to make my own decisions

People who are destined to succeed in their relationships understand and discuss the underlying needs, fears, dreams, and priorities that influence their opinions or actions in specific situations. They also try to understand the needs, dreams, and fears of other people involved in their lives. At some point during or after an argument, people destined for success pause and take the conversation to a different level, saying something like, "OK, I think I just figured out why this bothers me so much . . . I'm worried that . . ."

STANDING UP FOR YOURSELF WITHOUT PUTTING MY PARTNER DOWN

This page will help you with Steps 7–12 of the Sequence (pp. 28–32).

People who get respect and cooperation from their partners realize that the extent to which they stand up effectively for themselves and the extent to which their partners feel put down by them are two independent things. These people have the ability to stand up for themselves without feeling critical of their partners. (See the shaded quadrant below).

Did You Stand Up for Yourself?

(Did you require that your feelings or expectations be given as much consideration as My Partner's?)

	Yes, I Stood Up for Myself	No, I Didn't Stand Up for Myself
Yes, I felt Critical	<p><i>Critical, Standing Up</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You stood up for yourself, but My Partner felt put down by you. Although you didn't let My Partner "win," you made it almost impossible for her to truly respect your feelings and expectations. If My Partner feels you putting yourself on a higher plane, she won't respect you in the long run. Even if My Partner "gave in," she is probably feeling resentful toward you, and will try to "make things even" before long. 	<p><i>Critical, Not Standing Up</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You felt disapproving, disgusted or resentful, but didn't believe that it would get you anywhere to try to require equal consideration. It wasn't worth the hassle. My Partner didn't feel grateful for you "giving in." In fact, she may still be quite angry with you, and even less likely to respect your feelings and opinions in the future. You have probably begun to distance yourself emotionally from My Partner. Unfortunately, this makes it even less likely that she will treat you with more respect in the future.
No, I didn't feel Critical	<p><i>Not Critical, Standing Up</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You stood up for yourself without putting My Partner down. You both required that My Partner give your feelings equal consideration and made it easy for her to do so. You reacted like someone who stands a very good chance of getting more respect and cooperation in the future, even if you didn't this time. 	<p><i>Not Critical, Not Standing Up</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You didn't require equal consideration, but you didn't feel upset about it. You may not have felt that you deserved to be given equal consideration, or if you did deserve it, it wasn't going to happen and it wasn't worth feeling upset about My Partner. Without meaning to, you encouraged My Partner to disrespect you.

Did You Feel Critical of My Partner?
 (Did you feel disapproving, disgusted or resentful toward My Partner, or think "put-downs" about her in your head?)



STANDING UP FOR YOURSELF WITHOUT PUTTING MY PARTNER DOWN: THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

Which of the four types of reactions (below) most often fits your typical reaction when My Partner does or says something that upsets you? In studies on relationships, the type of reaction described in the column on the right is the only one that predicts future respectfulness and cooperativeness in others. Each of the other three types of responses leads to increased defensiveness and/or decreased cooperativeness in others.

	Critical, Standing Up	Critical, Not Standing Up	Not Critical, Not Standing Up	Not Critical, Standing Up
Thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “She is so out of line! There’s no way I’m going to just sit here and take this crap!” • “I’ve got to make her see how off base she is!” • “I’m not going to let her get away with this!” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “She’s never satisfied, but that’s just how women are.” • “There’s no talking to her. I might as well just keep my mouth shut and ride this one out.” • “She won’t take no for an answer. It won’t do any good to push the issue.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I must have done something wrong if she’s so upset.” • “It’s probably my fault.” • “How can I make her less upset with me?” • “She’ll stay mad for days unless somehow I can “make it up to her.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I suppose there’s nothing actually wrong with what she wants . . . it’s just really different than what I want.” • “Just because she isn’t ‘wrong’ doesn’t mean that I should just give in.” • “I need to ask her to work with me on this one.”
Actions or Statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell her how out of line her thinking, actions or expectations are. • Counter each point she makes by pointing out the mistakes in her thinking or the unreasonableness of her expectations. • Make it clear that her behavior or thinking is unacceptable and you will not tolerate it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Fine! Have it your way! Are you happy now?” • Keep quiet when she is expressing her upset. • “Batten down the hatches” and ride this one out – be patient and wait for the storm to blow over. • Deny being angry, because she’ll only get more upset if she thinks you feel entitled to be frustrated with her. • Inside, detach from her – then deny that you are doing so. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’m sorry” • Trying to be extra nice to her so she won’t be so upset. • Keep “testing the waters” to see if she’s still upset. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I guess there isn’t anything wrong with what you want. It’s just really different than how I would ideally like things to be, and I don’t think there’s anything wrong with how I’d like things to be, either. This isn’t about right or wrong.” • “I’m not saying we have to do things my way. I’m just asking you to work with me.”

CHAPTER 2

Practice Forms

KNOWING HOW TO respond effectively when you feel mistreated or misunderstood is one thing, actually doing it is another. Old habits die hard because across our lives, each of our brains gets conditioned to produce highly specific *response programs*. These response programs are pre-programmed so that, once triggered, they unfold as if they had minds of their own, producing predictable patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Most of the time, it's an advantage to have these pre-packaged response circuits in our brains, because, when they are activated, we automatically experience motivation to learn, to love, to be close to others, to be playful, to defend and protect ourselves when needed, and so on. But when relationships are distressed, researchers have found that these automatic response circuits are often to blame. Often, the wrong circuits get activated at critical moments, and the needed circuits remain dormant. In order to implement various parts of the Sequence at the moments when they are needed, you may need to literally re-wire your brain for more flexibility. Because new habits in the brain are formed through repetition, there's no substitute for *practice*. This chapter contains a variety of exercises that will help you develop new emotional habits.

REVIEWING YOUR REACTIONS

What did My Partner say or do (or fail to say or do) that upset me?	
---	--

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate (right column) the extent to which you did each of the things described in the left column. 1 = not at all; 10 = completely

<i>The First Steps (see pp. 23–27)</i>		Rating (1–10)
1.	Remember: Do something different. Did you remind yourself that it's in your <i>own best interest</i> to try to respond in a different way from your typical response?	
2.	Give the benefit of the doubt. Did you avoid jumping to conclusions, and assume there must be some at least partly legitimate reason for My Partner's actions or viewpoint?	
3.	Find the understandable part. Did you become absolutely determined to find a partly understandable reason for My Partner's actions or viewpoint?	
4.	Explain what's driving my upset. Did you explain to My Partner the bigger need or worry that underlies your actions or viewpoint on the issue?	
5.	Offer assurance. Did you assure My Partner that you weren't saying she was wrong, or that things have to be entirely your way?	
6.	Work with me? Did you ask My Partner to work with you to find a way of proceeding that respects both of your feelings?	

<i>In spite of my good attitude, my partner didn't respond well to the First Steps (see pp. 27–33)</i>		Rating (1–10)
7.	Maintain your cool. Did you stay calm and avoid making a big deal of My Partner's initial disregard of your point of view?	
8.	Offer and ask. Did you assure My Partner that you care how she feels and you're willing to work with her, and also let her know that you expect her to be willing to work with you as well?	
9.	Stand Up/Engage (only if My Partner keeps dismissing your complaint) Did you let yourself get angry and make it clear that My Partner's attitude is not OK with you?	
10.	Reject My Partner (only if My Partner keeps dismissing your complaint) Did you let My Partner know that you didn't want to be around her?	
11.	Don't make a big deal of it. In your own mind, did you avoid making a big deal of your partner's behavior being stubborn, selfish, or critical?	
12.	Try again later. Did you avoid demanding an apology? Did you avoid trying to get him to see how selfish, stubborn, or inappropriate her behavior was? Did you assure My Partner that you care how she feels and are willing to try to talk about it again?	

On the Back Side. Please use the back of this form to answer the following questions:

1. Where did you first get off track in your reactions to My Partner?
2. If you could go through the situation over again, what is one change you could make in your *thinking* that would help your attitude or state of mind, and allow you to interact with My Partner more effectively (i.e., more on track with the Sequence, see p. 22)?

3. If you could do the situation over again, what is one change you could make in your *actions* that would make you more effective (i.e., more on track with the Sequence)?

STUDYING YOUR STATE OF MIND

Researchers have discovered that, when intimate partners are upset with one another, each partner generally reacts to the other in highly predictable and patterned ways. Thanks to some very helpful brain research since the early 1990s, we now know that this is because, across our lives, each of our brains gets conditioned to produce highly specific *response programs*. These are conditioned brain circuits that are preprogrammed so that, once triggered, they unfold as if they had a mind of their own, producing a predictable pattern of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. To improve your relationship, you will need to become very familiar with the specific response state patterns that happen inside of you during key intimate situations. Your best shot at acting differently comes when you can easily recognize when a response state problem is automatically activated inside of you, and when you develop the ability to shift internal states when needed.

In what situation are you hoping to react in a different way?

In this situation, what is the internal state or mood like that gets triggered in you? What does this state *feel* like?

What are some specific cues (words, nonverbal gestures, actions, circumstances) that trigger this mood state?

What things do you often think, do, or say when you're in this state?

What is the internal state you're going to practice shifting to?

What can you say to yourself that might help you shift?

Once you shift internal states, what kinds of things do you hope to say or do differently?

PRACTICING NEW REACTIONS

If you're like most people, developing the habits that ensure relationship success will require hard work and a lot of practice. The first step involves understanding the 10 habits for relationship success (pages 6–16) as well as how and when to implement each predictive habit when upsets occur (see the Sequence, pages 22–33). If you review this information frequently and diligently, within a short period of time, you'll feel confident that, at least in theory, you know how to respond effectively, no matter what My Partner does. As your therapy progresses, you'll begin to get a clear picture of how your usual habits of reacting in upsetting circumstances diverge from those that are most effective, you'll begin to see precisely where you tend to get "off track," and you'll make plans with your therapist about how you can react more effectively. This planning process is essential, but it probably won't be enough to help you change old habits when upsets occur. To really get the new information wired into your head, you'll need to review it over and over again. One of the best ways to do this is to make yourself audiorecordings that you can listen to many times. Here are three different kinds of audiorecordings you can make that will help solidify the new learning in your brain. Ask your therapist for suggestions and help in making these recordings.

1. Create Your Own Personalized Version of the Sequence, and Review It Daily

Prepare yourself to respond effectively when an upset occurs between you and My Partner by making yourself a recording in which you talk yourself through each step of the Sequence (summarized on page 22), then listen to it at least once a day. Personalize the Sequence, using your knowledge of the kinds of things that My Partner does that most often upset you, and your knowledge of how you and My Partner typically react in such situations. Draw from all of the things you've learned in your therapy and in this workbook. Remember, the foundation for effective responding is a non-judgmental attitude toward My Partner. Put information on this recording that will help you give My Partner the benefit of the doubt.

2. Make an "Emergency" Recording to Listen to at the Moments When You're Most Upset

No matter how much you listen to the first record, you may forget to use it when you actually get upset. Make another recording to listen to on such occasions. Say things on the recording that you think might help you calm down, drop the judgmental attitude, avoid making a big deal over My Partner's

objectionable behavior, and instead stand up for yourself without putting My Partner down.

3. Make a Recording that Enables You to Re-experience a Recent Upsetting Situation Differently

In this recording, tell yourself the story of a recent upsetting situation that occurred between you and My Partner. Tell the story vividly enough so that you can actually feel the usual upset feelings kick in. In your story, describe yourself beginning to react as you did back in the actual situation. However, as the story unfolds, describe yourself beginning to react differently. Change the story, describing yourself becoming aware that you are reacting ineffectively, and picture yourself proposing self-reminders that have the effect of helping you shift your attitude and becoming calmer. After telling the story of how you relaxed and issued self-reminders, finish the story by describing yourself interacting with My Partner in ways that are predictive of success.

Listen to the audiorecording every day at a time when you can relax and focus on the feelings that come up with the memory of the situation. To be effective, you must begin to feel some of the same upset feelings while listening to the recording as you did in the actual situation. Unlike the original situation, however, this time you'll be able to relax more and think differently as the situation plays out in your mind.

WHEN YOU'RE UPSET

What am I upset about?

Date and time of attempt to shift.

Quick Shift?

1. **Assure yourself.** Remind yourself that it's in your own best *interest* to change your usual reactions (see Sample Self-Reminders, p. 35). If you can change your reactions in situations like these, your partner will become more understanding and cooperative.
2. **Shift.** Relax and see if you can shift to a calmer place inside.
3. **Imagine.** Now ask yourself:
 - Can I keep an open mind and look for the partly legitimate reasons behind My Partner's actions or opinions?
 - Can I let go of my agenda and just listen for a few moments?
4. **If some part of you resists doing these things, proceed to step 5 below.** If you feel ready to give it a try, review the First Steps (pp. 23–27), then talk to your partner.

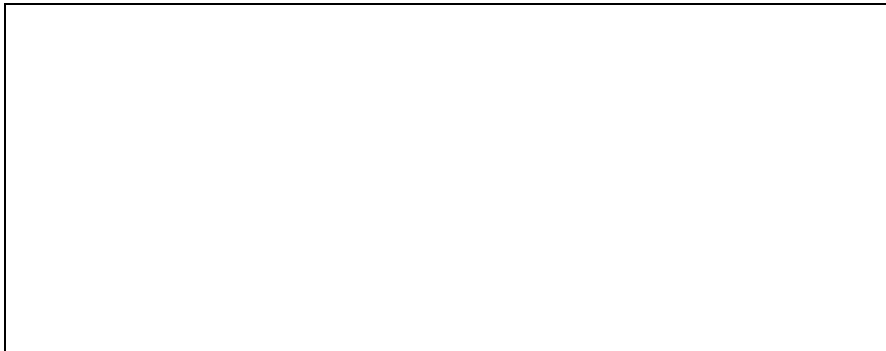
When Quick Shifting Doesn't Work

5. **Let it be.** Stop trying to get the feeling to change. Instead, try to just let it occupy your body for a few moments, while you try to listen to it. Sit down somewhere. Try to get into a position to allow your body to relax so that you can sense what you are feeling.
6. **Why not?** Ask this part of you, "Why don't you want to shift?" "What would be bad about getting into a frame of mind that would allow you to
 - keep an open mind and look for the partly legitimate reasons behind My Partner's actions or opinions?
 - let go of your agenda and just listen for a few moments?

Listen to this part of you for a while, then write down the answer that comes to you.



7. What assurances can you offer to this part of yourself?



Check again and see if you can imagine yourself giving My Partner the benefit of the doubt, and become determined to find and acknowledge the understandable logic behind her words or actions. If you feel ready to give it a try, review the First Steps (pp. 23–27), then talk to My Partner. If you don't feel ready, proceed to Step 8.

8. What's driving me? Ask this part of you, "What underlying need, fear, or priority is driving your feelings or actions in this situation?" Listen to this part of you for a while, then write down the answer that comes to you.



If some part of you still resists, refrain from talking to My Partner about the upsetting issue until your next therapy session.

A GUIDE FOR GETTING A SHIFT IN YOUR OWN INTERNAL STATES

If you've accepted the idea that it's in your own best interest to let go of your critical judgments of My Partner, but have trouble doing so at the moments when you get upset, it's probably because a neural response program has become active in your brain that's set up for self-protection. To calm this internal state, you may need to practice accepting it, listening to it, and trying small experiments with it.

Get "Alongside" of It

- Acknowledge the presence of the critical state (say a friendly "hello"). Think of it as a "part" of you who is upset about something important. Call it "you" rather than "me" or "I."
- Don't try to distract yourself or to push it away. Instead, "pull up a chair" for it. Let it know you'd like to keep it company for a while.
- Notice exactly how it feels in your body. (Where do you feel it most? What exactly is the feeling?)
- See if you can relax the rest of your body and invite this part of you to rest, undisturbed, in the spot where you feel it most.

Shift the Focus from External to Internal

- Notice your tendency to slip "inside" the state, rather than staying alongside of it. You'll know when this happens because when it does, you are no longer aware of noticing the thoughts going through your head. You *are* the thoughts. You will find that you are thinking only of the upsetting circumstances. When this happens, gently bring your attention back inside. In your brain, there is a big difference between thinking thoughts about your situation, and saying to yourself, "There you are, thinking those thoughts again." At first, you'll probably move back and forth between slipping "inside" the state, and then separating, stepping "outside" and noticing that you've just slipped back inside. This is fine. Every time you notice that you have slipped in, just step back out again. You'll get better at this as you practice.
- Ask yourself, "What is the *emotional quality* of the physical feeling in my body?" Take your time and try many different words here until you find one that feels most accurate. With each word, check it out with the state (e.g., ask the state, "Is that it? Are you feeling 'jumpy'? Or does 'restless' fit better?"). Don't worry about being exactly correct. Just keep trying and checking until you get a general sense that one particular word fits best.

- Check again to see if you are still relaxing and allowing the state to occupy your body rather than tensing or resisting it.
- Ask the state:
 - What is it about the situation that is making you react so strongly?
 - What is at stake here?
 - What are you afraid of, or worried about? Is there a basic need, value, or belief that is being threatened here?
 - What does it mean to you that your partner is acting this way?
 - What things have happened to you in the past that make you react more strongly than other people might here?
- Try to avoid using your head to answer these questions. Even if you think you know the answers, assume you don't, and try to allow ideas to come "up" from the state. Keep paying attention to the place in your body where you feel the state.

Assume a Nurturing Stance

- As you hear answers to the questions, let this part of you know that it is understandable that "she" feels that way (e.g., say, "That makes sense. Of course you're reacting so strongly. Other things like this have happened in your life, and it was really scary.>").
- Now, offer some assurances to the worries or fears behind the state. Ideally, you will have prepared these in advance.

Interact with the Internal State

- With each assurance, check to see how the state reacts. Go back to your body and see if it shifted any. If it didn't, don't be alarmed. Just try another assurance.
- Offer gentle challenges or counterpoints to the assumptions that are fueling the state. Ideally, you will have prepared these in advance.
- With each challenge or counterpoint, check to see how the state reacts. Go back to your body. If it doesn't shift, don't worry. Instead, say, "You're the boss. You decide. I'm just offering you some things to think about."
- Remind yourself of the last time you were able to make the shift that enabled you to act effectively (ideally, you will have prepared this memory in advance). Remember how it *felt*.
- Remember how My Partner responded to your different behavior. Remember how that felt (ideally, you will have prepared this memory in advance).
- Remember a time when you felt really positively toward My Partner, or when she displayed a quality you really appreciated (ideally, you will have prepared this memory in advance).

- Visualize yourself doing the behavior that is predictive of success. What specifically are you saying or doing?

Be Persistent

- If the state has still not shifted, stay with it a little longer. Tell it, “Take a little while to think these things over. I’ll just stay with you a while.”
- If there is still no shift, suggest to it, “Maybe you just need a little more time. I’ll be back later.”

AUDIO-RECORDED COMPLAINTS

The purpose of this exercise is to give you practice in complaining to My Partner in good form, and to give her the opportunity to explore the reactions that tend to come up in her when you complain. Using the audiotapes you make doing this exercise, you will get better at launching complaints in a way that doesn't put My Partner on the defensive, and she will get better at listening and responding well to your complaints.

Here's the assignment: Between now and your next therapy session, whenever you feel upset with your partner, record your complaint on an audio-recorder as if you were complaining directly to her. Keep each complaint relatively short (1 minute), and deliver it the way you normally would if you were upset. When you have finished the audiorecorded complaint, prepare to record it again, this time trying to use the steps involved in launching an effective complaint (pp. 23–27), or, if your therapist has made an audiorecording for you to listen to when you are upset with your partner listen to this audiorecording first. Then, record your complaint again a second time. You and your therapist will listen to the difference between these complaints in your next session. Of course, you can actually deliver the complaint to My Partner in person too, if you want. But, if possible, before your actual interaction with her, record your complaint, first.

DEVELOPING A NON-JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDE

Date	What I found annoying or upsetting	Judgmental thoughts I had about the person	Non-judgmental alternative	How could I stand up for myself without judging this person?

CHAPTER 3

Special Circumstances

IF YOU'RE HAVING difficulty with the idea that it's possible for you to stand up for yourself without putting your partner down, you'll get the clarification you need in this chapter. While most of the disagreements that arise between you and My Partner will likely be over issues for which there are no universally-agreed upon standards for right and wrong, there may be some things that My Partner does that are wrong by most anyone's standard. The section *When My Partner Is Clearly Wrong* (p. 58) describes how you can hold your partner accountable without getting on "your high horse."

Most of the time, people who develop the ability to do things predictive of success during or after arguments find that their partners become more cooperative and willing to listen. There may come a time, however, when in spite of your most sincere attempts (on many occasions) to interact with My Partner with a good attitude (as summarized in the *First Steps of the Sequence*, p. 22), and respond to My Partner's continuing dismissals or criticism by standing up for yourself effectively (as in the bottom section of the *Sequence*), My Partner refuses to work collaboratively with you. In such a situation, you may need to take standing up for yourself to another level. The section *Taking a Firm Stand* (p. 60) will guide you through this process. Please do not attempt to implement the guidelines from this section without the consultation of your therapist.

WHEN MY PARTNER IS CLEARLY WRONG

There may be times when My Partner's behavior is so provocative or extreme that it is very difficult to look at it any other way than, "It's just plain wrong!" Examples include if she were to lie to you, cheat on you, or physically restrain or harm you (or threaten to). People who are destined to be treated better in the future respond very differently in these situations than people who are destined to be treated poorly over and over again. In a nutshell, people who are destined to succeed find a way to stand up for themselves without getting stuck in an attitude of superiority. If you communicate disgust or contempt for My Partner when you stand up to her, it is unlikely that she will treat you better in the future. If you are feeling indignant or superior, you will cancel out the positive impact that your assertiveness would have had.

How can you avoid feeling disgusted, indignant or superior if My Partner acts in ways that are clearly wrong? Few people can avoid these feelings at such moments. Fortunately, what you do in the minutes and hours following My Partner's objectionable words or actions is more important than your immediate reaction. People who are destined to be treated better may react immediately with disgust, but they avoid fueling their feelings of disgust or superiority in the minutes and hours that follow. In fact, they often think things that help them shift out of these feelings. Examples of such thoughts are:

"My partner is clearly out of line here, and I need to make it clear that this is unacceptable but . . ."

- Even though it doesn't excuse her actions, there are probably reasons why she acted this way that will make it more understandable to me once I know what they are.
- I've done plenty of things that were wrong in the past, too. I'm not in a position to act all high and mighty.
- Just because I try to avoid getting on my high horse doesn't mean that I should excuse My Partner's behavior, it just means that I don't need to get all superior about it. I just need to make it clear that I won't tolerate it any more than My Partner should tolerate me if I get out of line. I need to stand up for myself without making a big deal out of how wrong she is.

One of the most common mistakes that partners who are mistreated make is trying over and over again to explain how "wrong" it was for their partner to treat them that way. Such explaining is self-defeating for two reasons: First, it often substitutes for what really needs to happen: action. Actions speak louder than words. When your partner is doing something wrong, she probably already knows it, but doesn't care. Rather than trying to explain how awful it

is, just tell her to stop it! The second reason why explanations are usually self-defeating is that it's almost impossible to point out how wrong your partner is without assuming a superior attitude. My Partner won't be able to keep an open mind if she hears a morally superior tone from you.

The refusal to have a "high horse" attitude doesn't lessen the determination that successful people have to stand up for themselves. In fact, the combination of the right action (standing up for yourself) and the right attitude (not making a big deal of how wrong your partner is) is necessary for lasting change to occur. Once the right action and attitude are in place, you will likely find that My Partner will become more respectful. As this happens, you will need to try to understand why she treated you poorly in the first place, and assure her that you are willing to work with her to find mutually acceptable solutions. You'll also need to try to explain to My Partner your own feelings about the issue(s) over which she became upset. However, your willingness to discuss issues should come only after more respectful treatment from My Partner.

TAKING A FIRM STAND

Most of the time, individuals who develop the ability to do things predictive of success during or after arguments find that their partners become more cooperative and willing to listen. There may come a time, however, when in spite of your most sincere attempts (on many occasions) to interact with your partner with a good attitude (as summarized in the First Steps, p. 22), and respond to continuing dismissals or criticism by standing up for yourself effectively (as in the bottom section of the chart on p. 22), she refuses to work collaboratively with you. In such a situation, you may need to take “standing up for yourself” to another level. You may need to draw a line in the sand and refuse to continue business as usual. This involves taking action on your own behalf to make sure that you do not continue to be taken advantage of or disrespected. If you are able to do this without getting stuck feeling disgusted toward My Partner, the odds are good that she will eventually become more cooperative or respectful. Because implementing this skill generally involves doing something that My Partner will find upsetting, there is a risk of an escalation when you apply it. For this reason, we strongly recommend that you seek the support and advice of your therapist if you attempt to implement it.

*Focus on What You Need to Do to Be OK Rather than
Focusing on What Your Partner Should Be Doing
(or Trying to Figure Out What’s Wrong with Her)*

This skill involves a significant shift in attention. Rather than focusing on (and talking about) what your partner is doing that is unfair or selfish, this way involves focusing on what *you* need to do to make sure you do not continue to be mistreated. Rather than ruminating about what your partner should be doing, or trying to figure out why your partner is so clueless, or thinking about how unfair it is that you have to put up with this, you focus on cutting your losses and taking action on your own behalf.

Act for Yourself (Rather than Against Your Partner)

Acting for yourself involves regulating your participation and cooperation with your partner, rather than trying to regulate how your partner participates and cooperates with you. Rather than putting your partner down, you simply tell her what you will and will not do. The key word is *action*. Acting for yourself means being willing to withdraw your participation when, after your best attempts to create a respectful dialogue with your partner, you still don’t feel you are being treated with respect. People who develop the ability to act for

themselves do not walk around issuing ultimatums to their partners, cutting themselves off when their partners don't see things their way. In fact, they explore all possible avenues for mutual understanding and cooperation first, drawing a bottom line only when all else has failed. When they take a stand, it is usually with an attitude of resignation rather than intense anger.

When Should You Take a Firm Stand?

First of all, be sure that you have exhausted all other avenues. Have you implemented the Sequence (p. 22), including all 12 steps, if necessary, on many previous occasions? Does your therapist agree that you have? If your therapist does agree that you have done this work, and My Partner still continues to be unwilling to work with you toward mutually acceptable resolutions to your differences, then you should consider taking a firm stand.

How Should You Take a Firm Stand?

The best way of withdrawing cooperation will vary from situation to situation, and you should work closely with your therapist in developing a plan for your situation. The degree of withdrawal may vary from situation to situation in terms of "how much" and "how long." In one situation, it might involve just refusing to do things you normally do for your partner. In a more serious situation, it might involve separating from your partner until she decides to get some assistance to change abusive or addictive behavior. Those who are most successful in eventually getting cooperation from their formerly non-cooperative partners share one characteristic: They draw the line with their partners without criticizing, blaming, judging, or putting them down. They avoid implying that they know what their partners should or should not be doing, they just state clearly what is and isn't OK with them.

After a period of withdrawal, try another attempt to explain your point of view without criticism or contempt, recognize and acknowledge the reasonable part of your partner's argument, listen non-defensively, and assure your partner that you are not as rigid as you may seem on the issue.

Sometimes stating your intent to withdraw, particularly if it is made in a noncritical, nonblaming way, will trigger a shift in My Partner toward more willingness to listen and cooperate, and actual withdrawal may not be necessary. However, if you withdraw in an attempt to change your partner (rather than to prevent yourself from being taken advantage of), it will most likely fail. In these situations one of life's most profound paradoxes can be seen: Those individuals who genuinely stop trying to get their partners to "see the error of their ways" (and instead focus on changing their own reactions) most often end up with partners who actually do "see the error of their ways."

Taking a firm stand is a serious move in a relationship, and should be done only with careful planning and consideration, only as a last resort, *and should be done in consultation with your therapist*. If this move is not implemented skillfully, it will likely result in a worsening of your situation. However, taking a firm stand may be necessary for you to increase the possibility that your partner will treat you with more respect. When attempting to take a firm stand, there are so many ways to get off track that it's always good to have the consultation and support of your therapist as you engage in this process.

PART II

Strengthening My Friendship
with My Partner

CHAPTER 4

Being Curious about My Partner's World

THIS CHAPTER IS devoted to the seventh predictive habit, Being Curious about Your Partner's World. Studies suggest that a significant difference between couples destined to succeed versus those destined for failure is how much they know about each other's worlds. The chapter begins with four weeks of daily questions that will generate meaningful discussion about various aspects of your lives. Take one question at a time. Take a guess at the answer. Don't feel bad if your guess is off the mark. Just ask My Partner to fill you in. Use each question as a springboard to find out more information about each other. Don't stop once you confirm the answer. Try to guess *why* My Partner answered as she did, or ask her. The exercise What's on My Partner's Mind will help you remember to ask My Partner about the things that weigh heaviest on her mind each day.

KNOWING MY PARTNER'S INTERNAL WORLD

This exercise will help you with Habit 7 (Being Curious about Your Partner's World, p. 14).

STUDIES SUGGEST THAT a significant difference between couples destined to succeed versus those destined for failure is how much they know about each other's worlds. To build or refresh your knowledge, take one question at a time. Take a guess at the answer. Don't feel bad if your guess is off the mark. . . just ask My Partner to fill you in. Use each question as a springboard to find out more information about your partner. Don't stop once you confirm the answer. Try to guess why My Partner answered as she did, or ask her.

Week 1

Monday	What is My Partner looking forward to the most in the next week? Why?
Tuesday	What has My Partner done that she is most proud of lately? Why?
Wednesday	What one thing would My Partner like to accomplish most this year? Why?
Thursday	If My Partner had more free time, how would she want to use it? Why?
Friday	What has been most disappointing to My Partner lately? Why?
Saturday	What possession does My Partner most wish she could afford to have? Why?
Sunday	What is one talent that My Partner wishes she had more of? Why?

Week 2

Monday	When would My Partner say she made the biggest error in the judgment of character? Why?
Tuesday	What is at the top of My Partner's wish list for home improvement? Why?
Wednesday	What has My Partner been most upset at her parents about? Why?
Thursday	The last time My Partner was feeling down, what kinds of things did she say to herself to feel better?
Friday	What compliment has My Partner received from a person other than myself in the past? What was My Partner's reaction to the compliment?
Saturday	If My Partner could follow her heart right now and do one thing

Sunday	she otherwise wouldn't, what would it be? How would My Partner change her job if she were able to make it "ideal?" Why?
--------	--

Week 3

Monday	What is one thing that has made My Partner happy lately? Why?
Tuesday	Who does My Partner consider a major rival or enemy? Why?
Wednesday	What was one of My Partner's best childhood experiences? Why?
Thursday	Who is My Partner's greatest source of support (other than you)? What does this person do that makes My Partner feel supported?
Friday	What is the moment in My Partner's day when she often feels most serene? Why?
Saturday	What is most frustrating about My Partner's job lately? Why?
Sunday	Who are two people My Partner admires most? Why?

Week 4

Monday	When is a time when something(s) happened that made My Partner doubt herself? Why?
Tuesday	What was My Partner's favorite vacation? Why?
Wednesday	What would My Partner say that her parents have been most proud of her for? Why?
Thursday	What is My Partner looking forward to the most in the coming months? Why?
Friday	What is the most challenging part of My Partner's daily routine? Why?
Saturday	If My Partner could make her parents understand one thing before they died, what would it be? Why?
Sunday	When was My Partner the angriest recently (at someone other than you!)? Why?

CHAPTER 5

Keeping Sight of the Positive

THIS CHAPTER IS devoted to the eighth predictive habit, Keeping Sight of the Positive. People destined to succeed in their relationships are more aware of the positive things that happen in their relationships, and they acknowledge them more often. When relationships become distressed, studies show that partners underestimate the positive things that happen between them by about 50% compared to objective observers who rate the positive things that happen. Many positive things happen each day that escape the attention of those who are destined to fail in their relationships. On the other hand, people who succeed take advantage of opportunities to express appreciation. This chapter provides four exercises that will help you identify and acknowledge positive things that happen in your relationship or positive qualities in your partner.

APPRECIATIONS

This exercise will help you with Habit 8 (Keeping Sight of the Positive, p. 15).

Research studies confirm that in relationships destined for success, partners notice and acknowledge the small, positive things that happen.

One powerful way you can improve your relationship that costs you very little is to simply notice the positive things that are already happening. It could be something as small as a kind word or nonverbal gesture. Every day during the next week, make it a point to notice the small, positive things that happen. Then, cut or rip off the section of the chart below for that day and slip it to your partner to read sometime.

Day of Week	What Is One Thing My Partner Did (or Said) Yesterday that You Appreciated?
Today is	
Today is	
Today is	
Today is	
Today is	
Today is	
Today is	

EXTRA POSITIVE MOMENTS

This exercise will help you with Habit 8 (Keeping Sight of the Positive, p. 15).

Another powerful way you can improve your relationship that costs you very little is to simply notice the positive things that are already happening. It could be something as small as a kind word or nonverbal gesture. Every day during the next week, make it a point to notice the small, positive things that happen. Then, cut or rip off the section of the chart below for that day and slip it to My Partner to read sometime.

Day of Week	Think back over the last the day or two and ask yourself, "When was a moment or moments when I felt the most extra positive about My Partner or about our relationship?" Take a minute to remember the details. Write about it briefly.
Today is	
Today is	
Today is	
Today is	
Today is	
Today is	
Today is	

REMEMBERING THE GOOD TIMES

This exercise will help you with Habit 8 (Keeping Sight of the Positive, p. 15).

Research studies suggest that when difficult times arise in a relationship, partners can become so consumed with negatives that they may temporarily forget the positive times they have had together. One difference between relationships that succeed and those that fail is that in those destined for success, partners remember positive times more often, and they talk about them, too. One strong preventive measure you can take to protect your relationship is to remind each other of the positive times. This week, take a few moments each day to think back over your relationship and remember a time you and My Partner shared that was special. As you remember the time, try to describe what you liked about it. What was special about that time? At the end of the day, share your memory with My Partner, either in verbal or written form.

	A Good Time You Remember . . .	Why You Liked It . . .
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

THINKING ABOUT My Partner

This exercise will help you with Habit 8 (Keeping Sight of the Positive, p. 15).

Research studies suggest that just taking a few minutes to think about My Partner in positive ways each day can have a dramatic effect on your relationship. Take a few moments to think about the following things.

Today is (date) (time)

What is one thing My Partner did (or said) yesterday that I appreciated?
What was one particular time when I felt extra positive about My Partner or about our relationship? Take a minute to remember the details. Write about it briefly.
What will My Partner's day be like today? What do I want to remember to ask her about when I get home?
What is one small thing I did yesterday that I hope made My Partner feel cared for?

CHAPTER 6

Making and Responding to Bids for Connection

THIS CHAPTER IS devoted to the ninth predictive habit, Making and Responding to Bids for Connection. Throughout daily life, in both small and large ways, people who are destined to succeed in their relationships both make and respond to bids for each other's attention and interest. The exercises in this chapter will help you engage emotionally with your partner. Small Acts of Caring will help you remember to initiate small favors for My Partner, delivered without strings attached. Connecting with the Intimacy States will help strengthen your ability to connect with mood states that naturally fuel closeness with My Partner. Finally, a series of guidelines and exercises for engaging in High/Low conversations will increase your ability to give and receive emotional support.

SMALL ACTS OF CARING

This exercise will help you with Habit 9 (Making and Responding to Bids for Connection, p. 15).

Research studies suggest that partners who initiate small acts of caring or connection, delivered without strings attached, are much more likely to end up in happy relationships than partners who neglect such small acts.

When intimate partners are upset with one another, they often neglect to initiate these small acts. The following chart is intended to help you plan to initiate small acts of caring for My Partner. Plan a week in advance. Then, when the day comes, see if you can get yourself into a mood to initiate these acts because of the sense of being cared for that they will bring My Partner. Remember, no strings attached. Even if My Partner doesn't seem to initiate small caring acts in return, try to not worry. You are now carrying out a behavior that is strongly predictive of marital success. If you are able to continue, the odds are simply much greater that, in time, you will feel cared for by My Partner, too.

Examples of small acts of caring: Something you can do to make My Partner's load a little lighter; something you can improve around the house that My Partner would appreciate; take the initiative to plan something for the two of you; spend time thinking about or learning about something important to My Partner; notice something in your day that you know My Partner would be interested in, then remember to tell My Partner about it; remember to ask My Partner about something specific that you know will be happening in her day; ask My Partner to do something with you (bike ride, walk, watch a TV show, etc.); take responsibility for making (or ordering) food for My Partner; buy My Partner a small something that you know she would like.

	Small Acts of Caring You Can Easily Do for Your Partner
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	

Sunday	
--------	--

CONNECTING WITH THE INTIMACY STATES

This exercise will help you with Habit 9 (Making and Responding to Bids for Connection, p. 15).

Brain scientists have discovered that our brains are equipped with four specific mood states that are critical to our ability to form emotional bonds with our intimate partners. These mood states fuel the good feelings and caring actions that characterize secure and satisfying relationships. Without them, partners might try to be nice to each other, but their words and actions will feel hollow. When partners drift apart, usually they've lost or neglected the ability to activate these needed mood states. Getting closer to your partner will require your ability to connect with her each day. These four mood states are:

Tenderness: When you connect with this mood state, you feel tenderness and warmth toward My Partner and interest in how she is doing inside. You'll feel sympathy when My Partner is stressed, and excitement when life is going well for her.

Emotional Need: When you connect with this mood state, you'll want your partner's interest and support. You'll look forward to My Partner's expressions of warmth, admiration, or fondness.

Playfulness: This state produces the urge to interact with My Partner in spontaneous or playful ways. You'll feel like teasing, roughhousing, tickling, or just getting a reaction from him.

Sexual Interest: When you connect with this state, you'll feel either mild or intense sexual interest. You'll let My Partner know that you're interested in her sexual attention. This state often comes along with the activation of playfulness.

Practice Instructions

1. Once per day, reserve 10 to 15 minutes when you can sit by yourself, completely undistracted.
2. Relax and clear your mind of whatever has been occupying it. Pick one of the mood states described above, and experiment with yourself. Try thinking about things that have the effect of moving you toward this mood state. For example, you might remember the most recent time you felt this way, and allow yourself to remember the details vividly.
3. Ask yourself, "What stands in the way of me being able to feel more tender, or playful, or sexual, or more need for My Partner's admiration, fondness, or emotional support?" If an answer comes to you, write it down in the right column of the chart on the next page. If the answer doesn't come to you right away, don't give up. Keep asking yourself these questions for a few minutes.
4. Before the end of each practice session, check and see how strongly you actually feel a particular mood state. Use the practice log below to rate the strength of your feelings on a scale of 1 to 10.

PRACTICING THE HIGH-LOW CONVERSATION

This exercise will help you with Habit 9 (Making and Responding to Bids for Connection, p. 15).

At least three times this week, set aside 20 to 30 minutes when you and My Partner can just be alone and talk to each other. During this time, take turns asking each other about the high and low points of each other's day. This is not the time to air your upsets with My Partner. It's a time to talk about your feelings about things or situations that don't involve her; for example, how you feel about things that have happened at work, or in your friendships, or in your family relationships. Use the suggestions on pages 79–80 to guide your conversations.

Please record these conversations on audiorecorder. Later, during the same day, when you are by yourself, complete the forms titled, High–Low Review: Your Experience Speaking and High–Low Review: Your Experience Listening.

Before your next appointment with your therapist, pick the conversation from the previous week that was *least* satisfying to you. Please bring the recording of this conversation to your next therapy session. (The recording you choose might be the same as My Partner's choice, or it might be different.) Your therapist will review each of your recordings with you separately during your next session.

HIGH-LOW CONVERSATION: GUIDELINES FOR THE LISTENER

These guidelines will help you with Habit 9 (Making and Responding to Bids for Connection, p. 15).

Attempts to cheer up one's partner often backfire, because the partner who is feeling bad interprets the "cheering" attempts of her partner to be evidence that the "cheering" partner is uncomfortable with the "feeling bad" partner's feelings and wants the "feeling bad" partner to "get over it." Well-intended comments like these:

- Don't let it get you down.
- I'm sure everything is going to work out.
- Maybe she didn't mean to hurt you.
- Things aren't as bad as they seem.
- I think you did the right thing.
- Let's figure out what to do about this problem!

Are often heard as:

- I can't handle your being so upset!
- I don't want to understand how you are feeling; I just want you to stop feeling this way.
- Would you stop being so sensitive? You're overreacting!
- You shouldn't feel that way!
- Enough said, now let's move on! or I'd rather help you change the way you feel than really understand how you are feeling.

*Avoid Trying to Make My Partner Feel Better Until
You Have Spent Time Helping Her Feel Understood*

It's not that advice or "focusing on the positive" comments are never helpful. It's a matter of timing. First help your partner feel understood, then explore different avenues for dealing with the problem situation, *but only if My Partner asks for it*. Actually, you may find that your help in advice giving or problem solving isn't even necessary, because if My Partner feels understood and supported, she may automatically feel better and know what to do. Feeling understood is often the most critical factor in feeling better. So, when you sense that My Partner is feeling bad, try beginning with the following:

- Ask yourself: "Can I be comfortable allowing my partner to feel bad for a few minutes while I keep her company?"

- Slow down. Communicate that you have time to listen.
- Avoid giving your reactions to what My Partner is saying.
- Avoid giving advice.

*When My Partner Begins to Tell You about the
Low Point in Her Day*

Ask for More Details. Your goal is for My Partner to leave the conversation feeling that you have understood exactly what it was like for her, and to feel your support.

- What about the situation was the most upsetting to you?
- What was that like for you? What were you thinking? How did you feel?
- What was the worst about it?
- How long did you feel upset? Are you still upset?
- What did you do?
- What did you feel like doing?
- Why do you think that happened?

Give Sympathy: I'm sorry you had a hard day. I think you've had a harder day than me. How about if you just try to relax for a while and I take care of the kids. I don't like it when people treat you that way.

Give Emotional Support: I'm on your side. We're in this together. I'll help you if you want me to.

Be Affectionate: Why don't you come over here and let me rub your shoulder's for a few minutes? Here, you put your feet up while I get you something to drink. Here, let me hold you for a minute.

HIGH-LOW CONVERSATION: GUIDELINES FOR THE SPEAKER

These guidelines will help you with Habit 9 (Making and Responding to Bids for Connection, p. 15).

Take Your Time

As you are talking, take the time to think about how you felt (or are feeling). Sometimes, you have to stop for a few moments and “sense” how you feel about the whole thing. Otherwise, you’ll end up just describing the details of what happened rather than what it was like for you inside. Often the specific quality of feelings or the reasons why we feel certain things only become clear when we ponder them for a few moments.

Come up for Air!

Pause every once in a while to give My Partner a chance to react to what you are saying.

Even Mildly Frustrating Situations Are Worth Talking About

If you are the kind of person who doesn’t like to make a big deal about your feelings, you might have to really think hard to remember recent times when you felt bad. If there were no situations that produced strong feelings, focus on small changes in your emotional state. It’s rare to have a perfectly “flat-line” day when it comes to your emotions. There are usually little ups and downs. Try to remember these.

Describe Any Vulnerable Feelings You Had, Even if You Only Felt Them Mildly (see the list below)

-
- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------|
| • Disappointed | • Unlovable | • Confused |
| • Insecure | • Lonely | • Betrayed |
| • Powerless | • Sad | • Inadequate |
| • Helpless | • Guilty | • Unimportant |
| • Discouraged | • Afraid | • Incompetent |
| • Unappreciated | • Worried | |
-

If You Want Advice, Say So

Otherwise, My Partner will just try to act as a sounding board and a shoulder to lean on.

HIGH-LOW REVIEW: YOUR EXPERIENCE LISTENING

This exercise will help you with Habit 9 (Making and Responding to Bids for Connection, p. 15).

Ask My Partner to sit down and tell you what it was like to be her today. Ask about the high and low points of the day, when she felt the best and the worst. Later, by yourself, please complete this form.

Name:	Date:
What was the topic that My Partner talked about?	
How interested were you in what she was saying?	
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
Not interested at all	Totally interested
Why do you think you weren't more interested?	
How much sympathy or excitement did you feel for My Partner when she was describing the high and low points?	
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
None at all	A lot
Why do you think you didn't feel more sympathy or excitement?	

CHAPTER 7

Pursuing Shared Meaning

THIS CHAPTER IS devoted to the tenth predictive habit, Pursuing Shared Meaning.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER'S DREAMS

This exercise will help you with Habit 10 (Pursuing Shared Meaning, p. 16).

One of the important qualities of successful intimate partnerships is that partners plan their lives together, rather than being at the mercy of the rat race, or taking the path of least resistance.

The following is a list of important areas you might want to give some thought to as a couple. During the next week, decide with your partner which of the areas (listed below) you want to discuss during your next therapy session. Before the next session, set aside about an hour to sit by yourself and write down your thoughts about the agreed upon areas. With each area, ask yourself not only what you would ideally like, but also ask yourself:

- Why do you feel the way you do?
- What past experiences have shaped your feelings in this area?
- Have your feelings in this area changed over time? If so, why?

During your next therapy session, you will read each other's thoughts, discuss the questions with one another, discover your areas of common ground, discuss your differences, and find ways to honor both of your values, philosophies, and dreams. Although in many areas you can have separate needs, you will find ways to be supportive of each other in these areas. Where you differ fundamentally, you will find ways of being respectful, honoring the differences between you.

Your Relationship

- What are the most important things to you about being in an intimate partnership?

- What do you want to get out of your relationship?
- What would you like to have more of in your relationship?

Friendships

- How much time would you like to spend with friends? Would you like more time with friends than you have currently?
- How much time would you like My Partner to spend with friends?
- To what extent would you like to talk to your friends about your relationship with My Partner?
- To what extent is it OK with you if My Partner talks about you and your marriage or partnership with her friends? Are there any topics you'd like to see off limits? Why?

The Kids

- What kind of a parent do you want to be?
- What values or attitudes is it most important to you that you instill in your kids?
- What do you hope your kids get from having My Partner as a mom?
- What kind of things do you want to do more of as a family?

Time Alone

- How much time each week do you think is realistic to have with My Partner alone?
- How would you like to spend your alone time as a couple?

Vacations

- How much time do you feel is realistic to spend on vacations each year?
- What are the most important things about vacations?

Coping with Sickness

- When you're feeling sick, how would you like to be treated by My Partner?

Handling Stress

- When you're feeling anxious or stressed for reasons other than your relationship, what do you want (or not want) from My Partner?

Extended Family

- How much contact would you ideally like to have as a couple (or family) with each extended family? Why? What *kind* of contact would you like to have?
- How much contact would you like to have individually with extended family members? Why?

Values and Priorities

- What values and priorities do you hold in common?
- How can you do a better job of making room for My Partner's values or priorities that may be different from yours?

Spirituality

- How important do you feel that spirituality should be in your relationship?
- Are there any spiritual rituals or practices you would like to share? Explain.

Sexuality

- What do you want most from your sex life?
- What kind of sexual activity would you like to explore further?

Individual Pursuits vs. Joint Pursuits

- How satisfied are you with the extent to which you and My Partner do things together vs. separately?
- What kinds of "individual" things do you wish you had more time for?