

A Summary of Dr. Harley's Basic Concepts

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3550_summary.html

You have just been introduced to all the Basic Concepts that I use whenever I try to save a marriage. If you apply them all to your marriage, you will do what most couples want to do, but have failed to do -- fall in love and stay in love. And that's what ultimately saves marriage -- restoring the feeling of love.

Of course, it takes much more than just the feeling of love to build a successful marriage. It takes your willingness and ability to care for and protect each other. But that feeling of incredible attraction is the best litmus test of your success in giving each other the care and protection that you need. If you are both in love, your Takers are convinced that the relationship is a good deal for both of you, and will not interfere with what's going on. Your Givers have free reign to provide each other the best of what you both have to offer.

When you are in love, your emotions help you meet each other's emotional needs. They provide instincts that you may not have even known you have -- instincts to be affectionate, sexual, conversational, recreational, honest and admiring. These all seem to come naturally when you are in love.

But when you fall out of love, everything that will help your marriage seems unnatural. Your instincts turn against marital recovery, and toward divorce. That's why I've created these Basic Concepts -- to help you do what it takes to restore your love for each other when you are not in love, when you don't feel like doing any of them. And then once your love is restored, these concepts will help you stay in love for the rest of your lives.

I present my summary of basic concepts in a slightly different order than they were first presented to you. When they are presented briefly, they're a little more logical when presented this way.

Basic Concept #1: The Love Bank

In my struggle to learn how to save marriages, I eventually discovered that the best way to do it was to teach couples how to fall in love with each other -- and stay in love. So I created a concept that I called the Love Bank to help couples understand how people fall in and out of love. This concept, perhaps more than any other that I created, helped couples realize that almost everything they did affected their love for each other either positively or negatively. And that awareness set most of them on a course of action that preserved their love and saved their marriages.

Within each of us is a Love Bank that keeps track of the way each person treats us. Everyone we know has an account and the things they do either deposit or withdraw love units from their accounts. It's your emotions' way of encouraging you to be with those who make you happy. When you associate someone with good feelings, deposits are made into that person's account in your Love Bank. And when the Love Bank reaches a certain level of deposits (the romantic love threshold), the feeling of love is triggered. As long as your Love Bank balance remains above that threshold, you will experience the feeling of love. But when it falls below that threshold, you will lose that feeling. You will like anyone with a balance above zero, but you will only be in love with someone whose balance is above the love threshold.

However, your emotions do not simply encourage you to be with those who make you happy -- they also discourage you from being with those who make you unhappy. Whenever you associate someone with bad feelings, withdrawals are made in your Love Bank. And if you withdraw more than you deposit, your Love Bank balance can fall below zero. When that happens the Love Bank turns into the Hate Bank. You will dislike those with moderate negative balances, but if the balance falls below the hate threshold, you will hate the person.

Try living with a spouse you hate! Your emotions are doing everything they can to get you out of there -- and divorce is one of the most logical ways to escape.

Couples usually ask for my advice when they are just about ready to throw in the towel. Their Love Banks have been losing love units so long that they are now deeply in the red. And their negative Love Bank accounts make them feel uncomfortable just being in the same room with each other. They cannot imagine surviving marriage for another year, let alone ever being in love again.

But that's my job -- to help them fall in love with each other again. I encourage them to stop making Love Bank withdrawals, and start making Love Bank deposits. I created all of the remaining Basic Concepts to help couples achieve those objectives.

Basic Concept #2: Instincts and Habits

Instincts are behavioral patterns that we are born with, and habits are patterns that we learn. Both of them tend to be repeated again and again almost effortlessly. They are important in our discussion of what it takes to be in love because it's our behavior that makes deposits and withdrawals from Love Banks, and our instincts and habits make up most of our behavior.

Instincts and habits can make Love Bank deposits, so it is imperative to know how to create those habits because once they are learned, deposits are made repeatedly and almost effortlessly.

Unfortunately, many of our instincts and habits, such as angry outbursts, contribute to Love Bank withdrawals. Since they are repeated so often, they play a very important role in the annihilation of Love Bank accounts. If we are to stop Love Bank withdrawals, we must somehow stop destructive instincts and habits in their tracks. Instincts are harder to stop than habits, but they can both be avoided.

As we discuss the remaining concepts, keep in mind the value of a good habit, and the harm of a bad habit, because their effect on Love Bank balances are multiplied by repetition.

Basic Concept #3: The Most Important Emotional Needs

How can you deposit love units into each other's Love Banks the fastest? That's a question I asked literally hundreds of couples when I was first learning how to save marriages. Eventually their answer became clear to me -- you must meet each other's most important emotional needs.

You and your spouse fell in love with each other because you made each other very happy, and you made each other happy because you met some of each other's important emotional needs. The only way you and your spouse will stay in love is to keep meeting those needs. Even when the feeling of love begins to fade, or when it's gone entirely, it's not necessarily gone for good. It can be recovered whenever you both go back to making large Love Bank deposits.

First, be sure you know what each other's most important emotional needs are (complete the Emotional Needs Questionnaire). Then, learn to meet the needs that are rated the highest in a way that is fulfilling to your spouse, and enjoyable for you, too.

It's likely that you and your spouse do not prioritize your needs in the same order of importance. A highly important need for you may not be as important to your spouse. So you may find yourself trying to meet needs that seem unimportant to you. But your spouse depends on you to meet those needs, and it's the most effective and efficient way for you make large Love Bank deposits.

Basic Concept #4: The Policy of Undivided Attention

Unless you and your spouse schedule time each week for undivided attention, it will be impossible to meet each other's most important emotional needs. So to help you and your spouse clear space in your schedule for each other, I have written the Policy of Undivided Attention: Give your spouse your undivided attention a minimum of fifteen hours each week, using the time to meet the emotional needs of affection, conversation, recreational companionship and sexual fulfillment. This policy will help you avoid one of the most common mistakes in marriage -- neglecting each other.

This Basic Concept not only helps guarantee that you will meet each other's emotional needs, but it also unlocks the door to the use of all the other basic concepts. Without time for undivided attention you will not be able to avoid Love Busters and you will not be able to negotiate effectively. Time for undivided attention is the necessary ingredient for everything that's important in marriage.

And yet, as soon as most couples marry, and especially when children arrive, couples usually replace their time together with activities of lesser importance. You probably did the same thing. You tried to meet each other's needs with time "left over," but sadly, there wasn't much time left over. Your lack of private time together may have become a great cause of unhappiness, and yet you felt incapable of preventing it. You may have also found yourself bottling up your honest expression of feelings because there was just no appropriate time to talk.

Make your time to be alone with each other your highest priority -- that way it will never be replaced by activities of lesser value. Your career, your time with your children, maintenance of your home, and a host of

other demands will all compete for your time together. But if you follow the Policy of Undivided Attention, you will not let anything steal from those precious and crucial hours together.

I suggest that you (a) spend time away from children and friends whenever you give each other your undivided attention; (b) use the time to meet the emotional needs of affection, conversation, recreational companionship, and sexual fulfillment; and (c) schedule at least fifteen hours together each week. When you were dating, you gave each other this kind of attention and you fell in love. When people have affairs, they also give each other this kind of attention to keep their love for each other alive. Why should courtship and affairs be the only times love is created? Why can't it happen in marriage as well? It can, if you set aside time every week to give each other undivided attention.

Basic Concept #5: Love Busters

When you meet each other's most important emotional needs, you become each other's source of greatest happiness. But if you are not careful, you can also become each other's source of greatest unhappiness.

It's pointless to deposit love units if you withdraw them right away. So in addition to meeting important emotional needs, you must be sure to protect your spouse, and the Love Bank, from withdrawals. And paying attention to how your everyday behavior can make each other unhappy does that.

You and your spouse were born to be demanding, disrespectful, angry, annoying, independent (insensitive) and dishonest. These are normal human traits that I call Love Busters because they destroy the feeling of love spouses have for each other. But if you promise to avoid being the cause of your spouse's unhappiness, you will do whatever it takes to overcome these destructive tendencies for your spouse's protection. By eliminating Love Busters, you will not only be protecting your spouse, but you will also be preserving your spouse's love for you.

Basic Concept #6: The Policy of Radical Honesty

It isn't easy to be honest. Honesty is an unpopular value these days, and most couples have not made this commitment to each other. Many marriage counselors and clergymen argue that honesty is not always the best policy. They believe that it's cruel to disclose past indiscretions and it's selfish to make such disclosures. While it makes you feel better to get a mistake off your chest, it causes your partner to suffer. So, they argue, the truly caring thing to do is to lie about your mistakes or at least keep them tucked away.

And if it's compassionate to lie about sins of the past, why isn't it also compassionate to lie about sins of the present -- or future? To my way of thinking, it's like letting the proverbial camel's nose under the tent. Eventually you will be dining with the camel. Either honesty is always right, or you'll always have an excuse for being dishonest.

To help remind couples how important honesty is in marriage, I have written the Policy of Radical Honesty: Reveal to your spouse as much information about yourself as you know; your thoughts, feelings, habits, likes, dislikes, personal history, daily activities, and plans for the future.

Self-imposed honesty with your spouse is essential to your marriage's safety and success. Honesty will not only bring you closer to each other emotionally, it will also prevent the creation of destructive habits that are kept secret from your partner.

The Policy of Radical Honesty combined with the Policy of Joint Agreement are two guidelines that will help you create an open and integrated lifestyle, one that will guarantee your love for each other. They also prevent the creation of a secret second life where infidelity, the greatest threat to your marriage, can grow like mold in a damp, dark cellar.

Basic Concept #7: The Giver and Taker

Have you ever thought that your spouse is possessed? One moment he or she is loving and thoughtful, and the next you are faced with selfishness and thoughtlessness. Trust me, it's not a demon you're up against, it's the two sides of our personalities. I call them the Giver and the Taker.

All of us want to make a difference in the lives of other. We want others to be happy, and we want to contribute to their happiness. When we feel that way, our Giver is influencing us. The Giver's rule is do whatever you can to make others happy and avoid anything that makes others unhappy, even if it makes you unhappy. It encourages us to use that rule in our relationships with other people.

But we also want the best for ourselves. We want to be happy, too. When we feel that way, our Taker is influencing us. The Taker's rule is do whatever you can to make yourself happy, and avoid anything that

makes yourself unhappy, even if it makes others unhappy. If that rule ever makes sense to you, it's because your Taker is in control.

These two primitive aspects of our personality are usually balanced in our dealings with others. But in marriage they tend to take turns being in charge. And that leads to most of the problems that couples encounter. If we take the advice of our Giver, we are willing to suffer to make our spouse happy, and if we take the advice of our Taker, we are willing to let our spouse suffer to make us happy. In either case the advice we are given is short sighted because someone always gets hurt.

Basic Concept #8: The Three States of Mind in Marriage

The Giver and Taker create moods that I call states of mind. These states of mind have a tremendous influence on the way a husband and wife try to resolve conflicts. But in each of the three states of mind, negotiation is almost impossible. That's what makes negotiation, in general, so tough in marriage.

When we are in love and happy, we are usually in the State of Intimacy. That state of mind is controlled by the Giver, which encourages us to follow the Giver's rule: do whatever you can to make your spouse happy and avoid anything that makes your spouse unhappy, even if it makes you unhappy. That rule can lead to habits that may be good for our spouse, but can be disastrous for us because we are not negotiating with our own interests in mind.

Sadly, flawed agreements made in the state of Intimacy can lead to our own unhappiness, and that in turn wakes the slumbering Taker. As long as we are happy, our Taker has nothing to do, but when we start feeling unhappy, our Taker rises to our rescue and triggers the State of Conflict. With the Taker now in charge, we are encouraged to follow the rule: do whatever you can to make yourself happy, and avoid anything that makes yourself unhappy, even if it makes others unhappy. The Taker also encourages us to be demanding, disrespectful and angry in an effort to force our spouse to make us happy. Fighting is the Taker's favorite "negotiating" strategy.

When fighting doesn't work, and we are still unhappy, the Taker encourages us to take a new course of action that triggers the State of Withdrawal. Instead of trying to force our spouse to make us happy, our Taker wants us to give up on our spouse entirely. We don't want our spouse to do anything for us, and we certainly don't want to do anything for our spouse. In this state of mind we are emotionally divorced.

How can couples work their way back to the state of Intimacy once they find themselves trapped in the state of Withdrawal? And once they are back, how can they stay there? The answers to those questions are found in the next Basic Concept.

Basic Concept #9: The Policy of Joint Agreement

Marital instincts do not lead to fair negotiation. They either lead to giving away the store (state of Intimacy) or robbing the bank (state of Conflict). And in the state of Withdrawal, no one even feels like negotiating. Yet, in order to meet each other's most important needs and avoid Love Busters consistently and effectively, fair negotiation is crucial in marriage.

You need a rule to help you override the shortsighted advice of your Giver and Taker. Their advice is shortsighted because regardless of the rule, someone gets hurt. We get hurt when we follow the Giver's advice and our spouse gets hurt when we follow the Taker's advice. So I've created a rule to guarantee that no one gets hurt, and that's the ultimate goal in fair negotiation. I call this rule the Policy of Joint Agreement: Never do anything without an enthusiastic agreement between you and your spouse.

Almost everything you do affects each other. So it's very important to know what that effect will be before you actually do it. The Policy of Joint Agreement will help you remember to consult with each other to be sure you avoid being the cause of each other's unhappiness. It also makes negotiation necessary, regardless of your state of mind. If you agree to this policy, you will not be able to do anything without the enthusiastic agreement of the other, so it forces you to discuss your plans, and negotiate with each other's feelings in mind. Without safe and pleasant negotiation, you will simply not be able to reach an enthusiastic agreement.

Basic Concept #10: Four Guidelines for Successful Negotiation

If you and your spouse are in conflict about anything, I recommend that you do nothing until you can both agree enthusiastically about a resolution. But how should you go about coming to that agreement? I suggest you follow four essential guidelines.

Guideline 1: Set ground rules to make negotiation pleasant and safe.

Ground rule 1: Try to be pleasant and cheerful throughout negotiations

Ground rule 2: Put safety first. Do not make demands, show disrespect, or become angry when you negotiate, even if your spouse makes demands, shows disrespect or becomes angry with you.

Ground rule 3: If you reach an impasse and you do not seem to be getting anywhere, or if one of you is starting to make demands, show disrespect or become angry, stop negotiating and come back to the issue later.

Guideline 2: Identify the problem from both perspectives with mutual respect for those perspectives.

Guideline 3: Brainstorm with abandon - give your creativity a chance to discover solutions that would make you both happy. Carry a pad and pencil with you to jot down ideas as you think of them throughout the day.

Guideline 4: Choose the solution that meets the conditions of the Policy of Joint Agreement best - mutual and enthusiastic agreement.

Whenever a conflict arises keep in mind the importance of finding a solution that will deposit as many love units as possible, while avoiding withdrawals. And be sure that the **way** you find that solution also deposits love units and avoids withdrawals

The Love Bank

Inside all of us is a Love Bank with accounts in the names of everyone we know. When these people are associated with our good feelings, "love units" are deposited into their accounts, and when they are associated with our bad feelings, love units are withdrawn. We are emotionally attracted to people with positive balances and repulsed by those with negative balances. This is the way our emotions encourage us to be with people who seem to treat us well, and avoid those who seem to hurt us.

The emotional reactions we have toward people, whether attraction or repulsion, is not a matter of choice. Love Bank balances cause them. Try "choosing" to be attracted to those you associate with some of your worst experiences -- it's almost impossible. Or try to feel repulsed by those associated with your best feelings. You do not decide whom you will like or dislike -- it's their association with your feelings, whether they have made Love Bank deposits or withdrawals, that determines your emotional reactions to them.

We like those with positive Love Bank balances and dislike those with negative balances. But if an account reaches a certain threshold, a very special emotional reaction is triggered -- romantic love. We no longer simply like the person -- we are in love. It's a feeling of incredible attraction to someone of the opposite sex.

The feeling of love is the way our emotions encourage us to spend more time with someone who takes especially good care of us -- someone who is effective at making us very happy and knows how to avoid making us unhappy. We would certainly want to spend time with someone we simply liked, but by giving us the feeling we call love, our emotions give us added motivation. We find ourselves not only wanting to be with the person, but also craving that person. When we are together we feel fulfilled, and when apart we feel lonely and incomplete. So the feeling of love is usually effective not only in drawing people together for significant amounts of time, but also in encouraging them to spend their entire lives together in marriage.

But our emotions give us more than the feeling of love. When they identify someone who makes us happy, they also motivate us to reciprocate by encouraging us to make that person happy. They do this by making it seem almost effortless to do what makes most of us the happiest. Have you ever noticed that when you are in love, you seem instinctively affectionate, conversant, admiring and willing to make love? That's because your emotions want to keep that person around, so it gives you instincts to help you make that person happy which, if effective, triggers his or her feeling of love for you. The "look of love" not only communicates our feeling of love for someone, but also reflects our instinct to do whatever it takes to make that person happy.

When a man and woman are both in love, their emotions encourage them to make each other happy for life. In fact, the thought of spending life apart is usually frightening. It seems to them that they were made to be together for eternity. In almost every case, a man and woman marry because they are in love, and they are in love because their love bank balances are above the romantic love threshold.

But what goes up can usually come down, and love bank balances are no exception. As most married couples have discovered, the feeling of romantic love is much more fragile than originally thought. And if Love Bank balances drop below the romantic love threshold, a couple not only lose their feeling of passion for each other, but they lose their instinct to make each other happy. What was once effortless now becomes awkward, and even repulsive. Instead of the look of love, couples have the look of apathy. And without love, a husband and wife no longer want to spend their lives together. Instead, they start thinking of divorce, or at least living their lives apart from one another.

It should be obvious to you by now that the Love Bank is an extremely important concept in marriage. If you want your instincts and emotions to support your marriage you must keep your Love Bank accounts over the romantic love threshold. But how can you keep your balances that high? And what can you do if they have already fallen below that threshold?

I've worked long and hard to find answers to those questions, because they hold the key to saving marriages. Without love, spouses are poorly motivated to remain married for life, but with the restoration of love and its accompanying instinct to spend life together, the threat of divorce is overcome. Marriages are saved when love is restored.

All of my remaining basic concepts will help me explain the answer to those questions, but the general principle is simple: If a couple wants to have a happy and fulfilling marriage, they must make as many Love Bank deposits as possible and avoid making withdrawals. To achieve this, behavior must change. A husband and wife must learn how to make each other happy, and how to stop making each other unhappy.



The next concept will help you understand why you behave the way you do, and what you can do to change your behavior.

Next Concept:

[Instincts and Habits](#)

Instincts and Habits

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3250_habits.html

Most people think they have control over their behavior. They think they choose to do whatever it is they do. But many of us who have studied human behavior scientifically, and have tried to help people change their behavior, know differently. We know that the vast majority of what a person does is driven by instincts and habits -- ways of behaving that are automatic and almost effortless. So if you want to make Love Bank deposits and avoid withdrawals, pay close attention to the subject of instincts and habits. That's because if you don't try to control them, they can control you and destroy the love you have for each other.

You were born with instincts that are there to help you survive. Instincts are behavioral patterns that do not seem to be learned -- they occur in almost finished form the first time they are triggered. It's obvious that babies have a variety of instincts because they do many of the same things, such as sucking their thumbs, that weren't taught to them. But even as adults, we have more instinctive behavior than we realize, and much of this behavior will make or break a marriage.

Habits are different than instincts because they are learned. Habits are formed by practice, and without practice, for example, you could never have walked up to a computer for the first time and type 90 words a minute. A habit is any behavior that is repeated often enough to become automatic and almost effortless. And if certain conditions are present when you are learning the behavior (a particular room, for example), eventually those conditions will tend to trigger the habit or make it easier to perform.

Even complex social skills are habits learned through repetition. Conversation, for example is perfected through considerable practice, as is affection, admiration, and even honesty.

If you had to think creatively about each of your actions throughout the day, your brain would have to be the size of a barn. So to save on brain space, some of your behavior is stored as instincts while other behavior is stored as habits. Whenever a particular behavior is summoned, you can automatically repeat what's stored rather than carefully create the behavior from scratch. That way you don't have to think about every response you make throughout the day. You simply trigger an instinct or habit that is stored away in your brain. By the time you get to be my age, so much of your behavior is in the form of habits that you can get through most of the day on autopilot. That's why older people like me are so predictable.

Instincts often help habits develop. An angry outburst is a good example of this. I've seen an angry outburst at the moment of a child's birth, and we can be assured that there wasn't much learning that caused that behavior. And as a child grows, the way anger is expressed becomes increasingly sophisticated. But it isn't the instinct that becomes sophisticated -- it's the developing habit of an angry outburst, supported by the instinct, that makes it sophisticated. In marriage, one of our most destructive behaviors is an angry outburst, where we intentionally try to hurt our spouse, causing massive Love Bank withdrawals. But it's something we do naturally -- it's instinctive.

Instincts and habits, such as angry outbursts, are often inappropriate. They may have been created as valid solutions to certain problems, but many are unsuitable for other problems that trigger them anyway. This is where our intelligence comes in handy. We can actually eliminate certain habits when we discover that they are ineffective in solving certain problems, and we can substitute effective habits.

We can't change our instincts, but we can short-circuit their approach to a problem. If I have an instinct to have angry outbursts, it doesn't mean that I must actually have one. I can create new habits that prevent me from losing my temper. Bad habits are hard to replace with good habits, especially when they are driven by instinct, but it can be done. And, in marriage, it must be done if it is to be successful.

In my study of what it takes to build Love Bank accounts, I learned that habits were much more important to consider than isolated instances of behavior. Habits that deposit love units build very large Love Bank balances because they are repeated over and over almost effortlessly. Isolated behavior, on the other hand, usually doesn't effect the Love Bank that much. In the same way, habits that withdraw love units tend to destroy Love Bank balances because they are also repeated almost effortlessly.

So I encourage spouses to get into the habit of doing whatever it takes to make each other happy (deposit love units), and avoid habits that made each other unhappy (withdraw love units). A simple commitment to do just that is a good place to start. But Love Bank balances change for the better only when that commitment directs couples to create new habits.



All of my remaining basic concepts will help me show you how to form habits that will create and sustain your love for each other. My next basic concept will help you form habits that build Love Bank balances.

Next Concept:

[The Most Important Emotional Needs](#)

The Most Important Emotional Needs

As soon as I realized that a large Love Bank balance triggered the feeling of love, I went to work trying to discover what spouses could do for each other that would make the largest Love Bank deposits. I would ask couples, "What could your spouse do for you that would make you the happiest?" That very question focused on a core issue in marriage -- the issue of care. I could have asked the question, "How would you like your spouse to care for you?" As it turns out, care in marriage is doing what it takes to make each other happy.

When you were married, you and your spouse both promised to care for each other, and you expected that care from each other. You were in love, and you were highly motivated to make each other happy. But it might not have occurred to you at the time that if you didn't care for each other the right way, you might lose your love for each other. And along with your loss of love, you might lose your willingness to care for each other.

At the time, you probably did not know what caring for each other the right way meant. You thought that your commitment to care for each other would be sufficient to sustain your love. Even today, you may still be in the dark as to what it takes to care for each other the right way.

If that's the case, let me explain to you what care in marriage is: To care the right way, you must make large Love Bank deposits. And I've found that the best way to make those deposits is to meet each other's most important emotional needs.

What is an emotional need? It is a craving that, when satisfied, leaves you with a feeling of happiness and contentment, and, when unsatisfied, leaves you with a feeling of unhappiness and frustration. There are probably thousands of emotional needs. A need for birthday parties, peanut butter sandwiches, Monday Night Football, I could go on and on. Some people have some of those needs while others have different needs. If you feel good doing something, or if someone does something for you that makes you feel good, an emotional need has been met.

But not all emotional needs are created equally. When some are met, you may only feel comfortable--they make small Love Bank deposits. There are others, however, that can make you feel downright euphoric. In fact they make you so happy that you're likely to fall in love with the person that meets them. I call those our **most important emotional needs** because they make the largest Love Bank deposits of all. And those are the very same emotional needs that a husband and wife expect each other to meet in marriage.

By now you can probably see where I'm headed. My first goal when counseling a couple is to help them identify their most important emotional needs. Once those needs are identified, I help them learn to meet those needs for each other. I want them to make the largest deposits possible into each other's Love Banks. If all goes well, they begin making those large deposits and eventually they are in love with each other.

When I first began using this approach to saving marriages, I didn't know what made people the happiest in marriage -- I didn't know what emotional needs would be the most important. So I had to ask hundreds of men and women that question, "What could your spouse do for you that would make you the happiest?"

As spouses explained what they wanted most, I classified their desires into emotional need categories. And almost all those I interviewed described one or more of only ten emotional needs as being most important to them (admiration, affection, conversation, domestic support, family commitment, financial support, honesty and openness, physical attractiveness, recreational companionship and sexual fulfillment). Very few ever named a most important emotional need that was not included in this list of ten.

I also made a revolutionary discovery that helped me understand why husbands and wives tended **not** to meet each other's most important emotional needs. Whenever I asked couples to list their needs according to what they needed most, men would list them one way and women the opposite way. Of the 10 emotional needs, the five listed as most important by men were usually the five least important for women, and vice-versa.

What an insight! It is no wonder that husbands and wives have so much difficulty meeting each other's needs: They lack empathy. They are willing to do for each other what they appreciate the most, but it turns out that their efforts are misdirected. What they appreciate the most, their spouses appreciate the least!

Pay close attention to this next point I am about to make, because it is one of the most misunderstood aspects of my entire program.

Everyone is unique. While men **on average** pick a particular set of five emotional needs as their most important and women on average pick another set of five, any given man or woman can and do pick various combinations of the ten. So even though I know the most important emotional needs of the average man and woman, I don't know the emotional needs of any particular husband or wife.

I'm in the business of trying to save all marriages, not just average marriages, so I encourage each couple to ignore what I say about average male and female needs and identify those that are unique to them. That way each spouse's list of the most important emotional needs reflects what he or she appreciates the most. When they meet those needs for each other, they create the greatest happiness, and trigger a mutual feeling of love.

These conclusions are reflected in my book [His Needs, Her Needs](#) where I explain how couples build romantic love by learning how to meet each other's most important emotional needs. Readers are encouraged to identify these needs by using the Emotional Needs Questionnaire that I provide at the back of the book. Then I encourage them to become experts at meeting those needs. This questionnaire is also available to you on this website. Just click, [Emotional Needs Questionnaire](#), to discover the most important emotional needs for you and your spouse. Be sure to print two copies so you and your spouse each have one.

Before you fill out the questionnaire read a short description of each need that I've provided for you so that you will be accurate in the choices you make.

- [Affection](#)
- [Sexual Fulfillment](#)
- [Conversation](#)
- [Recreational Companionship](#)
- [Honesty and Openness](#)
- [Physical Attractiveness](#)
- [Financial Support](#)
- [Domestic Support](#)
- [Family Commitment](#)
- [Admiration](#)

Once you have identified each other's most important emotional needs, your next step is to learn how to meet them. I've written several Q&A columns to help you achieve that objective. Listed below are some of those columns.

Affection

[How to Meet the Need for Affection](#)

Sexual Fulfillment

[How to Meet the Need for Sexual Fulfillment](#)

[Changing a Willingness to Make Love into a Desire to Make Love](#)

[How to Overcome Pain During Intercourse?](#)

[How to Overcome Sexual Aversion?](#)

[What to Do When Your Spouse Has an Addiction to Pornography](#)

Conversation

[What to do When Your Conversation Becomes Boring and Unpleasant](#)

Recreational Companionship

[Why Should a Couple Be Together When They Are the Happiest?\(Part 1\)](#)

[What to Do When Your Recreational Companionship Becomes Boring and Unpleasant \(Part 1\)](#)

[What to Do When Your Recreational Companionship Becomes Boring and Unpleasant \(Part 2\)](#)

Before we leave the very important topic of how to make Love Bank deposits, I want you to understand how important it is for you to schedule enough time to meet each other's most important emotional needs. You



simply will not do a very good job making each other happy while doing something else or in your spare time—you need to schedule quality time each week to give each other your undivided attention. I make this crucial point in the **Policy of Undivided Attention**.

Next Concept:

[The Policy of Undivided Attention](#)

The Policy of Undivided Attention

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3350_attn.html

Before you were married, spending time alone with each other was your highest priority. You probably spent the majority of your leisure time together, and the time you spent together was probably the most enjoyable part of every week.

You tried to talk to each other every day. If you couldn't be with each other face-to-face, you talked on the telephone, maybe for hours. And when you were together, you gave each other your undivided attention.

But after marriage, like so many other couples, you may find that you can be in the same room together and yet ignore each other emotionally. What's even worse, you may find that you are not even in the same room together very often, particularly after your children arrived.

One of the more difficult aspects of marriage counseling is scheduling time for it. The counselor must often work evenings and weekends because most couples will not give up work for their appointments. Then the counselor must schedule around a host of evening and weekend activities that take a husband and wife in opposite directions.

But finding time for an appointment seems easy compared to arranging time for the couple to be together to carry out their first assignment. Many couples think that a counselor will solve their problem with weekly conversations in his office. It doesn't occur to them that it's what they do after they leave the office that saves the marriage. To accomplish anything, they must schedule time together -- time to give each other their undivided attention.

It's incredible how many couples have tried to talk me out of their spending more time together. They begin by trying to convince me that it's impossible. Then they go on to the argument that it's impractical. But in the end, they usually agree that without time for undivided attention, they cannot re-create the love they once had for each other.

And that's my point. Unless you and your spouse schedule time each week for undivided attention, it will be impossible to meet each other's most important emotional needs. So to help you and your spouse clear space in your schedule for each other, I encourage you to follow

The Policy of Undivided Attention:
Give your spouse your undivided attention
a minimum of fifteen hours each week,
using the time to meet his or her
most important emotional needs.

This policy will help you avoid one of the most common mistakes -- neglecting each other after marriage. I have tried to clarify this policy for you by offering three corollaries: Privacy, Objectives and Amount.

Corollary 1: Privacy

The time you plan to be together should not include children (who are awake), relatives or friends. Establish privacy so that you are better able to give each other your undivided attention.

It is essential for you as a couple to spend time alone. When you have time alone, you have a much greater opportunity to make Love Bank deposits. Without privacy, undivided attention is almost impossible, and without undivided attention, you are not likely to meet some of each other's most important emotional needs.

First, I recommend that you learn to be together without your children. This can be very difficult for many couples, especially when children are very young. They don't think that children interfere with their privacy. To them, an evening with their children is privacy. While they know they can't make love with children around, the presence of children prevents much more than sex. When children are present, they interfere with affection and intimate conversation, two very vital needs in marriage. Besides, affection and intimate conversation usually lead to lovemaking, and without them, you will find that your lovemaking suffers.

Second, I recommend that friends and relatives not be present during your time together. This may mean that after everything has been scheduled, there is little time left for friends and relatives. If that's the case, you're too busy, but at least you will not be sacrificing your love for each other.

Third, I recommend that you understand what giving undivided attention means. It's what you did when you were dating. You probably would not have married if you had ignored each other on dates. You may have parked your car somewhere just to be completely alone, and to rid yourselves of all distractions. That's the quality of undivided attention I'm referring to here.

When you see a movie together, the time you are watching it doesn't count toward your time for undivided attention (unless you behave like the couple who sat in front of my wife and me last week!). It's the same with television and sporting events. You should engage in these recreational activities together, but the time needed for undivided attention is different -- it's the time you pay close attention to each other.

Now that you're alone with each other, what should you do with this time? The second corollary answers that question.

Corollary 2: Objectives

During the time you are together, create activities that will meet the emotional needs of affection, sexual fulfillment, conversation and recreational companionship.

Romance for most men is sex and recreation; for most women it's affection and conversation. When all four come together, men and women alike call it romance and they deposit the most love units possible. That makes these categories somewhat inseparable whenever you spend time together. My advice is to try to combine them all.

After marriage, women often try to get their husband to meet their emotional needs for conversation and affection, without meeting their husband's needs for sex and recreational companionship. Men, on the other hand, want their wives to meet their needs for sex fulfillment and recreational companionship, without meeting their wives needs for affection and conversation. Neither strategy works very well. Women often resent having sex without affection and conversation first, and men resent being conversant and affectionate with no hope for sex or recreation. By combining the fulfillment of all four needs into a single event, however, both spouses have their needs met, and enjoy the entire time together.

A man should never assume that just because he is in bed with his wife, sex is there for the taking. In many marriages, that mistake creates resentment and confusion. Most men eventually learn that if they spend the evening giving their wife their undivided attention, with conversation and affection, sex becomes a very natural and mutually enjoyable way to end the evening.

But there are some women who don't see the connection either. They want their husbands to give them the most attention when there is no possibility for sex. In fact, knowing that affection and intimate conversation often lead a man to wanting sex, they try hardest to be affectionate when they are out in a crowd. That tactic can lead to just as much resentment in a man as nightly sexual "ambushes" create in a woman. Take my word for it, the fulfillment of the four needs of affection, conversation, recreational companionship, and sexual fulfillment is best when they are met together.

Corollary 3: Amount

How much time do you need to sustain the feeling of love for each other? Believe it or not, there really is an answer to this question, and it depends on the health of a marriage. If a couple is deeply in love with each other and find that their marital needs are being met, I have found that about fifteen hours each week of undivided attention is usually enough to sustain their love. When a marriage is this healthy, either it's a new marriage or the couple has already been spending that amount of time with each other throughout their marriage. Without fifteen hours of undivided attention each week, a couple simply can't do what it takes to sustain their feeling of love for each other.

When I apply the fifteen-hour principle to marriages, I usually recommend that the time be evenly distributed throughout the week, two to three hours each day. When time must be bunched up -- all hours only on the weekend -- good results are not as predictable. Spouses need to be emotionally reconnected almost on a daily basis to meet each other's most important emotional needs.

The reason I have so much difficulty getting couples to spend time alone together is that when I first see them for counseling, they are not in love. Their relationship does not do anything for them, and the time spent with each other seems like a total waste at first. But when they spend time together, they learn to re-create the romantic experiences that first nurtured their love relationship. Without that time, they have little hope of restoring the love they once had for each other.

But fifteen hours a week is usually not nearly enough time for couples that are not yet in love. To help them jump-start their relationship, I usually suggest twenty-five or thirty hours a week of undivided attention until they are both in love with each other again.

Your time together is too important to the security of your marriage to neglect. It's more important than time spent doing anything else during the week, including time with your children and your job. Remember that the time you should set aside is only equivalent to a part-time job. It isn't time you don't have; it's time you will use for something less important, if you don't use it for each other.

To help you plan your week with each other's emotional needs in mind, I encourage you to meet with your spouse at 3:30 Sunday afternoon, to look over each other's schedule for the coming week to be sure you have provided time for each other. It's always a good idea to plan a little extra time in case of an emergency that may disrupt your 15 hours.

You have 168 hours every week (24x7) to schedule for something. I highly recommend 8 hours of sleep a night, so that leaves 112 waking hours. Getting ready for the day, and going to bed at night may require, say, 12 hours, and work plus commute may take another 50 hours. That leaves 50 more hours to spend doing what you value most, and 15 of those hours should be dedicated to maintaining a passionate and fulfilling marriage.

If you have not been in the habit of spending 15 hours a week for undivided attention, it will mean that something less important will have to go. But it will radically change your life for the better, because you will be investing in one of the single most important parts of your life -- your relationship with your spouse.

If you're not yet convinced, a Q&A column and an article I've written that may help you understand the importance of undivided attention are, [We Don't Spend Enough Time with Each Other](#), and [Why Women Leave Men](#).

You and your spouse fell in love with each other because you met some of each other's most important emotional needs, and the only way to stay in love is to keep meeting those needs. Even when the feeling of love begins to fade, or when it's gone entirely, it's not necessarily gone for good. It can be recovered whenever you both go back to being an expert at making Love Bank deposits. First, be sure you know what each other's needs are (complete the Emotional Needs Questionnaire). Then, learn to meet those needs in a way that is fulfilling to your spouse, and enjoyable for you, too.

Meeting important emotional needs is only half of the story, however. While that's how couples make the most Love Bank deposits, they must be sure that they're not making Love Bank withdrawals.

The next section introduces several concepts that will help you avoid hurting each other. You'd think that causing pain and suffering would be the last thing a married couple would want to do to each other, yet it's done instinctively and habitually. Unless you protect each other from your destructive habits and instincts, you will hurt each other so much that eventually your Love Bank accounts will be in the red -- you will hate each other.

You have already read quite a bit about making Love Bank deposits, and you may feel as if you have learned enough to put your marriage back on track. But don't stop reading now. The next basic concept is in some ways more important than those I've already introduced to you because if you don't know how to avoid hurting each other, you may not have the opportunity to care for each other. The two go hand-in-hand and without protection, care is impossible. So please read on.

Next Concept:
[Love Busters](#)

Love Busters

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3400_lovebust.html

The love you and your spouse have for each other is directly affected by almost all of your behavior. This is a point that I will repeat in most of my remaining concepts and Q&A columns. Until now, I have focused attention on behavior that will meet each other's most important emotional needs. When you behave that way, you are caring for each other. But the resulting Love Bank deposits will not do your marriage much good if other behavior leads to Love Bank withdrawals. So to help you gain control over your behavior so that you can learn to avoid making Love Bank withdrawals, I will introduce you to my next basic concept, Love Busters.

Why would any of us hurt the one we promised to love and cherish?

Lack of empathy is at the core of the problem. I was struck with what we are all up against while watching a Star Trek episode. Spock had volunteered to be possessed by an alien presence so that it could communicate with Captain Kirk of the Starship Enterprise.

As soon as it entered Spock's body, its first reaction was, "Oh, how lonely you must all feel."

You see, in the alien world, they were all connected to each other through telepathy so that each one could feel what everyone else felt. They were all emotionally bonded to each other. But as soon as the alien possessed Spock's body, it realized that we humans are all cut off from each other emotionally. And it viewed our state as incredibly isolated and lonely.

One of the most important consequences of our emotional isolation is that we cannot feel the way we affect others. And that creates the temptation to hurt others because in doing so we don't feel the pain we cause. If we were connected emotionally to others as the aliens were, we would be far less tempted to do anything thoughtless, gaining at someone else's expense. That's because in so doing, we would be hurting ourselves as well.

And that's what I always seem to be battling when I try to encourage one spouse to avoid doing anything that would hurt the other spouse. I cannot seem to trigger empathy. Each spouse complains about how thoughtless the other spouse is, without much awareness of his or her own thoughtlessness.

Lack of empathy helps makes thoughtlessness possible. Since we don't feel what other's feel, we tend to minimize the negative effects we have on others, and consider our thoughtlessness to be benign. An angry outburst is regarded by some as a creative expression. Disrespect is viewed as helping the other spouse gain proper perspective. And a demand is nothing more than encouraging a spouse to do what he or she should have done all along. None of these is seen as one spouse gaining at the other's expense, because the spouse who is inflicting the pain does not feel the pain. But whenever one spouse is the cause of the other's unhappiness, one thing's for sure -- Love Bank withdrawals are taking place.

I call all the ways that spouses are inconsiderate of each other's feelings Love Busters because that what they do -- they destroy the love that a husband and wife have for each other.

I've found that the most common Love Busters in marriage fall into six categories: Selfish Demands, Disrespectful Judgments, Angry Outbursts, Annoying Habits, Independent Behavior and Dishonesty

The first three of these Love Busters are instinctive, yet thoughtless, ways to try to get what you want from each other. When a request doesn't work, a spouse will often revert to a demand ("I don't care how you feel - do it or else!"). If that doesn't get the job done, a spouse will try disrespectful judgments ("If you had any sense, and were not so lazy and selfish, you would do it"). And then, when all of that fails, an angry outburst often represents the last ditch effort ("I'll see to it that you regret not having done it").

Of course, demands, disrespect and anger don't really get the job done. You generally don't do things for your spouse because of these Love Busters, you do them out of care and consideration. If your spouse is demanding, disrespectful and angry, you tend to be less caring and considerate, leading you to do less for your spouse. Instead of giving your spouse what he or she needs, demands, disrespect and anger cause you to resist. I want you to have what you need in your marriage, but demands, disrespect and anger will not get it for you. They will prevent you from having what you want if you revert to these destructive instincts.

But when you indulge in these three Love Busters, you do more than fail to get what you need -- you also destroy the love your spouse has for you. All of these instincts, and the habits they help create, cause your spouse to be unhappy, and that causes Love Bank withdrawals.

The fourth Love Buster, Annoying Habits, is behavior that is repeated without much thought that bothers your spouse. Marriage is a partnership of incredibly close quarters, where just about anything you or your spouse does is almost sure to affect the other. If you want to stay in love with each other, your habits, even the innocent ones, should make Love Bank deposits, not withdrawals.

The fifth Love Buster is Independent Behavior, the conduct of one spouse that ignores the feelings and interests of the other spouse. If your decisions are made as if your spouse doesn't even exist, you will find yourself running roughshod over your spouse's feelings and your Love Bank account. Since it's usually scheduled and requires some thought to execute, the simplest way to overcome it is to take it off your schedule. And if you follow the Policy of Joint Agreement, Independent Behavior will never find itself on your schedule in the first place.

Finally, the sixth Love Buster, Dishonesty, causes massive Love Bank withdrawals whenever it's discovered. And spouses usually discover each other's dishonesty because of their emotional closeness to each other. If you or your spouse have a tendency to lie or distort the truth, chase that bad habit out of your marriage before it ruins everything.

If you would like to identify Love Busters that are responsible for Love Bank withdrawals in your relationship, first read a summary of each by clicking their names listed below, and then click this name, the [Love Busters Questionnaire](#), and print two copies of the form, one for you and one for your spouse. After you have completed this form, the priorities you give each Love Buster will show you where to begin in sweeping these rascals out of your lives.

- [Selfish Demands](#)
- [Disrespectful Judgments](#)
- [Angry Outbursts](#)
- [Annoying Habits](#)
- [Independent Behavior](#)
- [Dishonesty](#)

If you have a few extra minutes, [The Parable of the Net](#) will help show you how Love Busters destroy marriage.

The sixth Love Buster, Dishonesty, is so important to overcome in marriage that I have given it a basic concept of it's own. After you have had a chance to read it, I think you will agree with me that it deserve special attention.

Next Concept:
[The Policy of Radical Honesty](#)

The Policy of Radical Honesty

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3900_honesty.html

Honesty and Openness is one of the ten most important emotional needs identified in marriage, which means that when it's met, it can trigger the feeling of love. But it's counterpart, dishonesty, is one of the five most destructive Love Busters. When spouses are dishonest, they destroy the love they have for each other.

But there is a third reason that honesty is crucial in marriage. Honesty is the only way that you and your spouse will ever come to understand each other. Without honesty, the adjustments that are crucial to the creation of compatibility in your marriage cannot be made. Without honesty, your best efforts to resolve conflicts will be wasted because you will not understand each other well enough to find mutually acceptable solutions.

Most couples do the best they can to make each other happy, at least for a while. But their efforts, however sincere, are often misdirected. They aim at the wrong target. Ignorance, not lack of effort, is often the most important cause of their ultimate downfall.

Couples are not only ignorant of ways to improve their marriages; they are often ignorant of the problems themselves. To avoid conflict, they sometimes deliberately misinform each other as to their feelings, personal history, activities, and plans. This not only leads to a failure to meet an important emotional need, and a withdrawal of love units when the deception is discovered, it also makes marital conflicts impossible to resolve. After all, how can you and your spouse solve a problem if your cards are not on the table?

To help you understand how honest you need to be to have a successful marriage, I have written the Policy of Radical Honesty. I call it "radical" because that's how many see my position on the subject. But I view my policy as simply advocating complete honesty in marriage. In our culture I guess that's a radical idea.

The Policy of Radical Honesty

**Reveal to your spouse as much
information about yourself as you know;
your thoughts, feelings, habits, likes,
dislikes, personal history, daily activities,
and plans for the future.**

To help explain this policy, I have broken it down into four parts:

1. **EMOTIONAL HONESTY:** Reveal your emotional reactions, both positive and negative, to the events of your life, particularly to your spouse's behavior.
2. **HISTORICAL HONESTY:** Reveal information about your personal history, particularly events that demonstrate personal weakness or failure.
3. **CURRENT HONESTY:** Reveal information about the events of your day. Provide your spouse with a calendar of your activities, with special emphasis on those that may affect your spouse.
4. **FUTURE HONESTY:** Reveal your thoughts and plans regarding future activities and objectives.

To some extent this policy seems like motherhood and apple pie. Who would argue that it's not a good idea to be honest? But in my years of experience as a marriage counselor, I have constantly struggled with the belief of many clients that dishonesty can be a good idea under certain conditions. Moreover, pastors and counselors themselves often advise dishonesty when a spouse has committed a particularly thoughtless act, such as infidelity. And many marital therapists warn against complaining, something that some consider one of the seven deadly sins of marriage. So instead of complaining, spouses often stuff their feelings and try to put a good face on a bad situation.

Granted, dishonesty can be a good short-term solution to marital conflict. It will probably get you off the hook for a few days or months or keep the problem on the back burner. But it's a terrible long-term solution. If you expect to live with each other for the next few years and still be in love, dishonesty can get you into a great deal of trouble.

Because there are so many out there who advocate dishonesty in marriage, I will describe the four parts of my Policy of Radical Honesty, and explain to you why I think they are so important in marriage.



The First Part of the Policy of Radical Honesty:
[Emotional Honesty](#)

The Policy of Radical Honesty

Emotional Honesty

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3801_honesty.html

Reveal your emotional reactions, both positive and negative, to the events of your life, particularly to your spouse's behavior.

Some people find it difficult to openly express negative reactions. They may fear that their response will be interpreted as criticism. Or they may feel ashamed of their own reactions, telling themselves they should not feel the way they do. They may want unconditional acceptance from their spouses and consider that their negative reactions prove their own inability to be unconditionally accepting. Whatever the reasons, many spouses try to avoid expressing their negative emotional reactions.

While positive reactions are easier to communicate, many couples have not learned to express these feelings, either. This failure not only misses an important opportunity to accurately communicate basic feelings, but it also misses an opportunity to deposit love units. Whenever your spouse has made you feel good, if you express those feelings clearly and enthusiastically, you'll reward your spouse for having made an appropriate adjustment to you. That, in turn, makes your spouse feel good.

If you want to meet each other's emotional needs, and you want to overcome Love Busters, one essential ingredient is an honest expression of your emotional reactions to each other. What makes a marriage successful is your willingness and ability to accommodate each other's feelings. And without the facts about those feelings, an otherwise happy couple can become very unhappy as the events of life change.

The conditions that existed at the time of your marriage were partly responsible for the love you had for each other. Those conditions made it easy for you to meet each other's emotional needs, and tended to ward off Love Busters. They may have made you feel perfect for each other, because you did not have to do much to make each other happy.

But if you are like most couples, those conditions changed right after your marriage and have continued to change right up to the present. If you have not been able to adjust to those changes, you are probably very disillusioned about your compatibility. What had seemed effortless at first may seem impossible for you now.

But adjustment in marriage is not impossible. In fact, it may be quite a bit easier than you think. Because of the way your brain is put together, you have the ability to make remarkable adjustments to each other throughout life, as your environment changes. But in order to be successful, you must do four things:

First, you must realize that these changes will take place, whether you want them to or not. Many of the circumstances surrounding you cannot be controlled and will be changing constantly.

Second, you must stick to your goal of meeting each other's most important emotional needs, and avoiding Love Busters regardless of the change in conditions. A change can be very distracting, and can cause both of you to lose sight of your primary objectives in life. Don't let these changes cause you to lose sight of each other.

Third, you must be totally committed to making all of your decisions jointly and enthusiastically. Changes in circumstances require new decisions, and each must be made with each other's feelings in mind. Otherwise, the changes will leave one of you in the dust. Don't go on in life unless you are both on board.

And finally, in order to make the best decisions, you must be radically honest with each other about your emotional reactions to the changes in your lives. The best decisions take the emotional reactions of both of you into account simultaneously, but without an honest expression of those reactions, you will be missing the target.

While some couples may fail to make a successful adjustment after feelings are honestly explained, failure is almost guaranteed when the need for adjustment is never communicated. Always take each other's complaints seriously. As I mentioned earlier, your emotional reactions are a gauge of whether you are making a good adjustment to each other. If you both feel good, you need no adjustment. If one or both of you feel bad, a change is indicated.

But let me also explain what honesty is not. It is not selfish demands or disrespectful judgments or angry outbursts.

Expressing a feeling is not the same as expressing demands. If you try to tell your spouse what to do, you are not revealing an honest feeling; you are making a demand. If your spouse does something that bothers you, the correct way to express it is simply say that it bothers you. The Policy of Joint Agreement would take over from that point to help you try to resolve the problem.

If you tell your spouse that he or she is wrong about something, you're not being honest, you are being judgmental. While you should be free to express your beliefs and opinions, you should respect your spouse's beliefs and opinions. If you try to "straighten out" your spouse, you are not being honest; you are making a disrespectful judgment. The expression of feeling should not carry judgmental baggage with it.

It goes without saying that angry outbursts are not expressions of honesty, either. When people have them, they often think that they are being honest, but that's their Taker trying to rationalize what is actually cruel and destructive. Whatever it is you have to say when you are angry is not worth saying. Keep that basic principle in mind so that you will keep your mouth shut when you feel angry. When you have recovered from your anger, it's safe to tell your spouse what was bothering you.

Failure to express negative feelings perpetuates the withdrawal of love units. It prevents a resolution to a marital conflict, because the conflict is not expressed. Negative feelings provide evidence that a couple has not yet achieved a successful marital adjustment. More work is needed.

But positive feelings not only offer proof for a successful adjustment, but they also provide a reward to the spouse that has been successful. Don't neglect to tell each other how you feel when you are happy.

Now we're ready to look at the second part of this Policy of Radical Honesty. This part faces the reality that history often repeats itself.

The Second Part of the Policy of Radical Honesty:

[Historical Honesty](#)

The Policy of Radical Honesty

Historical Honesty

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3802_honesty.html

Reveal information about your personal history, particularly events that demonstrate personal weakness or failure.

Whenever you and your spouse make a decision together or try to resolve a conflict with the Policy of Joint Agreement, one factor that must never be ignored is your past. That's because mistakes and successes of the past often provide evidence of what's likely to happen in the future.

While many people feel that embarrassing experiences or serious mistakes of the past should be forgotten, most psychologists recognize that these are often signs of present weakness. For example, if someone has ever had an affair, he may be vulnerable to another one. If someone has ever been chemically dependent, he is vulnerable to drugs or alcohol abuse in the future. By expressing past mistakes openly, your spouse can understand your weaknesses, and together you can avoid conditions that tend to create problems for you.

No area of your life should be kept secret. All questions asked by your spouse should be answered fully and completely with periods of poor adjustment in your past given special attention. Not only should you explain your past to your spouse, but you should also encourage your spouse to gather information from those who knew you before you met your spouse. I have encouraged couples that are considering marriage to meet with several significant people from each other's past. It's often a real eye-opener!

I carry this Policy of Radical Honesty about your past all the way to the disclosure of all premarital and extramarital sexual relations. That's because those experiences are among your most important experiences in life, and your spouse should know anything you regard as important. Past sexual experiences also create a contrast effect in marriage, and it's inevitable that you will compare your spouse sexually with all other past sexual relationships. Knowing your sexual history can make present sexual problems much easier to understand.

I've had clients argue that if they tell their spouses about mistakes made decades earlier, their spouses will be crushed and never trust them again. Why not just leave that little demon alone?

My answer is that it's not a "little demon." If you've had an affair, it's an extremely important part of your personal history, and it says something about your predispositions. If you've had an affair in the past, your spouse shouldn't trust you -- I certainly wouldn't.

But what if you haven't strayed since it happened? What if you've seen a pastor regularly to hold you accountable? Why put your spouse through the agony of a revelation that could ruin your relationship forever?

I'd say you don't give your spouse much credit! Honesty does not drive a spouse insane -- dishonesty does. People in general, and women in particular, want to know exactly what their spouses are thinking and feeling. When you hold something back, your spouse tries to guess what it is. If he or she is right, then you must continually lie to cover your tracks. If he or she is wrong, an incorrect understanding of you and your predispositions develops.

Maybe you don't really want to be known for who you are? That's the saddest position of all. You'd rather keep your secret than experience one of life's greatest joys -- to be loved and accepted in spite of your weaknesses.

Some counselors have argued that the only reason people reveal past infidelity is because of anger. They are deliberately trying to hurt their spouses with that information. Or they might be doing it to relieve their own guilt at the expense of their spouse's feelings.

While it's true that the spouse usually feels hurt, and vengeance or feelings of guilt motivate some, whenever correct information is revealed, an opportunity for understanding and change is presented. That opportunity is more important than unhealthy motives or momentary unhappiness.

Some revelations may need to be made in the presence of a professional counselor to help control the emotional damage. Spouses sometimes have difficulty adjusting to revelations that have been kept secret for years. In many cases, they're not reacting to the revelation as much as the fact that they'd been lied to all that time.

Some spouses with emotional weaknesses may need personal counseling to help them adjust to the reality of their spouses' past. The saints they thought they married turn out to be not so saintly. But the most negative reactions to truth that I've witnessed have never destroyed a person or a marriage. It's dishonesty that destroys intimacy, the feeling of love, and marriages.

When a couple first see me for counseling, I have them complete my [Personal History Questionnaire](#), which systematically reviews many of the significant events of their past. I ask them to share their answers with each other and feel free to ask any questions that would be triggered by them.

I offer you the same opportunity to investigate each other's past. I have posted that questionnaire for you to copy and complete. Simply click the name of the questionnaire in the previous paragraph and be sure to make two copies, one for both of you. Leave nothing out and be willing to pursue any line of inquiry that will help you better understand each other's past.

The Third Part of the Policy of Radical Honesty:
[Current Honesty](#)

The Policy of Radical Honesty

Current Honesty

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3803_honesty.html

Reveal information about the events of your day. Provide your spouse with a calendar of your activities, with special emphasis on those that may affect your spouse.

After six years of marriage, Ed discovered that it was easier to have a sexual relationship with a woman at the office than with his wife, Jennifer. As a result, he found Peggy a welcome solution to his sexual frustration. He spent time alone with her several times a week, and their sexual relationships was as fulfilling as he could have ever imagined.

Ed justified this infidelity by assuming he was doing Jennifer a favor by not imposing his sexual requirements upon her. Whenever Jennifer wanted to make love to him, he happily accommodated her, but she didn't feel a sexual need more than once or twice a month.

Ed didn't want to share information about his daily activities with Jennifer, since honesty would have ruined any hope of continuing this very satisfying solution. Moreover, the announcement of this relationship would have upset her. He still loved her very much and would not have wanted to put her through the grief of such a disclosure. So to preserve a temporary solution to his problem and to keep Jennifer from experiencing intense emotional pain, he felt that dishonesty was justified.

In good marriages, couples become so interdependent that sharing a daily schedule is essential to their coordination of activities. But in weak marriages, couples are reluctant to provide their schedules, because they are often engaged in an assortment of Love Busters. They may know that their spouses would object to their activities, so they tell themselves, What they don't know won't hurt them. They have what I call a "secret second life."

But there are many who really have nothing to hide; yet they feel the need for privacy. They are offended when their spouse asks where they've been or what they've done. They feel that their spouse should trust them, and not assume the worst.

I'm dead-set against privacy in marriage, because it creates an unnecessary barrier to problem solving. When you and your spouse married, two became one. That means that prior to marriage, you had no one but yourself to consider when you made choices, and now you have each other to consider. There should be no part of your life that is off limits to your spouse, because literally everything that either of you do will ultimately affect each other. Privacy breeds incompatibility because it represents a part of your life that is off limits to accommodation.

Even when activities are innocent, it's extremely important for your spouse to understand what you do with your time. Be easy to check up on and find in an emergency. Give each other your daily schedules so you can communicate about how you spend your time. Since almost every thing you do will affect your spouse, it is important to explain what it is you do.

If Jennifer and Ed had established a habit of exchanging daily information early in their marriage, his affair would have been almost impossible to arrange. And if they had negotiated with the Policy of Joint Agreement, his sexual problem would have been addressed and resolved.

Honesty is a terrific way to protect your spouse from potentially damaging activities. By knowing that you'll be telling your spouse what you've been up to, you're far less likely to get either of you into trouble.

The Fourth Part of the Policy of Radical Honesty:

[Future Honesty](#)

The Policy of Radical Honesty: Future Honesty

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3804_honesty.html

**Reveal your thoughts and plans regarding
future activities and objectives.**

After having made such a big issue of revealing past indiscretions, you can imagine how I feel about revealing future plans. They're much easier to discuss with your spouse, yet many couples make plans independently of each other.

Some couples don't explain their plans because they don't want to change them, even if their spouses express negative reactions. They feel that explaining a future plan may prepare the evening for war, and their spouses will successfully scuttle the plan.

Some don't explain their future plans because they don't think their spouses would be interested. There's nothing upsetting about the plan, so there'd be no point in revealing it.

But even if your plans are innocent, when you fail to tell your spouse your future plans, you're being dishonest. You don't really know what your spouse's reaction will be, and by failing to give advance notice, you may create a problem for the future. Besides, if you and your spouse are partners in life, your plans are important to both of you, whether your spouse feels that way or not.

You may feel your plans are best for both you and your spouse. Once your spouse sees the plan succeed, he or she will be grateful that you went ahead with it. Or, you may feel that if you wait for your spouse's approval, you will never accomplish anything. Perhaps your spouse is so conservative that if you wait for his or her approval, you think you'll miss every opportunity that comes your way.

Regardless of how you feel about revealing your plans, failure to do so will leave your spouse in the dark. While no love units are withdrawn at the time you're deceitful, they're almost sure to be withdrawn when your spouse realizes you've held back information. It also sets up the loss of more love units if your plans fails to take your spouse's feelings into account.

How many hours of waking time to you have at your disposal? Do you schedule any or all of that time? Do you and your spouse share your weekly schedules with each other before you commit yourselves to that time?

Since your schedule each week is part of your future plans, every hour you schedule should be discussed with your spouse before you firm them up. I suggest that every Sunday afternoon at 3:30, you and your spouse set aside one-half hour to go over your schedules for the coming week. That way you will not only know what each of you is doing that week, but you will have an opportunity to change any part of the schedule.

Of course, it would make sense for you to discuss your schedule on a daily basis, so that each new item could be reviewed as it comes along. But the reason that I suggest a final review on Sunday afternoon, is to get you into the habit of giving each other a chance to veto anything in either of your schedules that does not have your enthusiastic agreement. Get used to the idea that you simply cannot do something that your spouse does not like. And give your spouse an opportunity to react to whatever it is you are planning to do.

Now we will switch gears. So far, I have introduced Basic Concepts that help you make Love Bank deposits (Emotional Needs) and help you avoid making Love Bank withdrawals (Love Busters). But there is another topic that no couple should ever ignore, and that's how to negotiate. You already know that you can't make demands to get what you want. And you can't be disrespectful or angry. What's left?

What's left is thoughtful and respectful negotiation. Once you become skilled negotiators, you will not only find real solutions to your problems, but the very process of finding those solutions will be enjoyable for both of you.

But before I show you how to become skilled negotiators, I will show you why negotiating can be so tough in marriage.



Next Basic Concept:
[The Giver and the Taker](#)

The Giver and the Taker

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3550_give.html

Have you ever suspected your spouse of having two personalities -- one that is caring and considerate and one that seems impossible to get along with? I'm sure you've not only noticed, but you've probably been horrified by the impossible one. I call these two personalities the Giver and the Taker.

We all have them, Givers and Takers, and they make marital problem solving much more difficult than it should be. To help you understand why it's so difficult to communicate in marriage, and why it's so hard to be consistently kind and considerate, I'll explain to you who these characters are and how they make marriage so difficult.

The Giver is the part of you that follows the rule: **do whatever you can to make the other person happy and avoid anything that makes the other person unhappy, even if it makes you unhappy.** It's the part of you that wants to make a difference in the lives of others, and it grows out of a basic instinct that we all share, a deep reservoir of love and concern for those around us.

But the Giver is only half of the story. The other half is the Taker. It's the part of you that follows the rule: **do whatever you can to make yourself happy and avoid anything that makes yourself unhappy, even if it makes others unhappy.** It's the part of you that wants the most out of life, and it grows out of your basic instinct for self-preservation.

In everyday life, our Givers and Takers usually solve problems together. They recognize our need to give and take simultaneously. For example, when we buy groceries, we give money and take groceries. We don't give more money than the grocer charges us and we don't take groceries without paying for them.

But in marriage, a strange thing happens to the way our Givers and Takers operate. They seem to work independently of each other. Either the Giver is in charge, and we give unconditionally to our spouses, or the Taker is in charge where we take what we want from our spouses without giving anything in return.

When the Giver is in charge, we are loving and considerate. But we tend to make personal sacrifices to see to it that our spouses are happy and fulfilled, because our Takers are not there to defend our personal interests and our Givers do not care how we feel.

But when the Taker is in charge, we are rude, demanding and inconsiderate. All we seem to think about is ourselves, and what our spouses can do to make us happy. We expect our spouses to make sacrifices for us, because our Takers don't care how our spouses feel.

I want to emphasize to you that this is normal behavior in marriage. You might think you're married to a crazy person, or you may think you're crazy yourself, but let me assure you, marriage is one of the very few conditions that bring out the pure Giver and Taker in each of us. And that usually makes us seem much crazier than we really are.

It should be no surprise to you that it isn't the Giver that ruins marriages -- it's the Taker. But the Giver plays a very important role in creating the problem. It's the effort of the Giver to give our spouses anything they want that sets up the Taker for its destructive acts. After you have been giving, giving, giving to your spouse, and receiving little in return (because you haven't bargained for much), your Taker rises up to straighten out the situation. It sees the unfairness of it all, and steps in to balance the books. But instead of coming to a more balanced arrangement, where you get something for what you give, the Taker just moves the Giver out of the picture altogether. It says, "I've been giving enough, now it's your turn to give."

Sound familiar? We've all been through it, but it doesn't work. All our Takers do is rouse our spouses' Taker and before we can say, "Bull in a china closet," we're having fight.

Which brings up a very important observation -- The Taker's instinctive strategy for getting what we need in marriage is to make demands, show disrespect and have an angry outburst. Does that also sound familiar? They are the stupid instincts that I call, Love Busters. And that's precisely what the Taker usually does when given control of our marriage -- they ruin the love we have for each other.

But I'm getting a little ahead of myself. Before you can understand fully how Takers make us argue instead of negotiate, I need to explain my next concept to you.



Next Concept:

[The Three States of Mind in Marriage](#)

The Three States of Mind in Marriage

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3600_state.html

Some of the brightest people I know become idiots when faced with marital conflict. I've seen this happen in case after case. An intelligent man listens to his wife talking about her needs, her desires, her interests -- and it's as if she's speaking a foreign language. A brilliant woman hears her husband describe his perspective, and she doesn't get it. What makes marital communication so tough? Is it that men and women just can't communicate? Or is there something about marriage that blurs their thinking? Having spent decades counseling couples who seem communicationally challenged, I am thoroughly convinced that it is marriage itself (or more specifically, romantic relationships) that makes communication difficult, and not differences between men and women. The men I counsel have very little trouble resolving conflicts with women, and their wives are usually just as good negotiating with men. It's conflicts they have with each other that seem impossible to resolve. My experience trying to help couples negotiate has led me to the conclusion that, left to their own devices, they negotiate from one of three states of mind, each having it's own unique negotiating rules and it's own unique emotional reactions. I call these states of mind Intimacy, Conflict, and Withdrawal. And regardless which state spouses are in, negotiations can be very difficult.

The First State of Mind in Marriage:

[Intimacy](#)

The Three States of Mind in Marriage

The First State of Mind: Intimacy

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3605_state.html

The most essential prerequisite for the state of intimacy is the feeling of being in love. As I discussed in my section on the [Love Bank](#), you obtain that feeling when your spouse has deposited enough love units into his or her account in your Love Bank to trigger that reaction.

In this most enjoyable state of a relationship, spouses follow the rule of the [Giver](#). Do whatever you can to make **your spouse** happy, and avoid anything that makes the **your spouse** unhappy, even if it makes **you** **unhappy**. When both partners follow this rule, both are getting their [emotional needs](#) met, and all is well with the world.

In this state of mind the Giver is in charge and giving to each other seems almost instinctive. Both spouses have a great desire to make each other happy in any way they can, and want to avoid hurting each other at all costs.

As they protect each other, trust builds. They can share their deepest feelings, becoming emotionally vulnerable, because they know that they both have each other's best interests at heart. They feel so close to each other that to hurt the other person would be the same as hurting themselves.

Conversation in the state of intimacy is respectful and non-judgmental. The partners also express their deepest love for each other and gratitude for the care they are receiving. By lowering their defenses and forming a close emotional bond, they feel even greater pleasure when they meet each other's needs. This is the way marriage was meant to be.

Negotiation in this state of marriage is controlled by the Giver and the Giver's rule. When one spouse expresses a desire, the other rushes to fulfill it. There is no thought of repayment, because the Giver's care is unconditional. As long as both spouses are in the same state, there's actually nothing to negotiate--they give each other anything that's possible, and they do it unconditionally.

But giving unconditionally isn't really negotiating. It's giving whatever is requested without the need to bargain. And more importantly, it's with the attitude that bargaining would be somehow immoral, because it would imply conditionality.

You can get into some very bad habits when you are in the state of intimacy. A new mother in love with her husband may let her husband completely off the hook when it comes to child care. A husband in love with his wife may do nothing to restrain her tendency toward irresponsible spending, driving them both into backruptcy. And once these bad habits have been around for a while, they are very difficult to change.

You'd think that the state of intimacy would guide a husband and wife toward marital bliss. But, instead, because of the failure to negotiate terms that benefit both spouses, it tends to drive them toward the second state of mind in marriage, conflict.

The Second State of Mind in Marriage:

[Conflict](#)

The Three States of Mind in Marriage

The Second State of Mind: Conflict

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3610_state.html

As long as a husband and wife are happy, the state of intimacy hums right along. But no one is happy all the time, especially when making sacrifices to make someone else happy. And when unhappiness is experienced by either spouse, the slumbering Taker is immediately alerted to the pain.

"What's going on? Who's upsetting you?" the slumbering Taker wants to know.

It can be a temporary lapse if your spouse is still in a giving mood and apologizes for the error (whether or not it's his or her fault). Your spouse may promise to be more thoughtful in the future or make a greater effort to meet an unmet need. The Taker is satisfied that all is well, and goes back to sleep, leaving the Giver in charge, and keeping you in the state of intimacy.

But what happens if there are no apologies? What if the damage is not repaired quickly? What if one spouse continues to be thoughtless or unwilling to meet an emotional need?

When that occurs, the Taker, mindful of all your sacrifices in the state of Intimacy, comes to your defense.

I think it's time for a new rule, the Taker advises. You've done enough giving for a while, now it's time to get something in return. Instinctively, you adapt the Taker's rule: **Do whatever you can to make yourself happy, and avoid anything that makes yourself unhappy, even if it makes your spouse unhappy.**

When that happens, you've entered the second state of mind in marriage -- Conflict.

When one spouse follows this new rule, it isn't long before the other spouse's Taker pushes the Giver aside and is ready for battle. In this state of Conflict, spouses are no longer willing to be thoughtful or to meet each other's needs. Instead, they demand that the other spouse become more thoughtful and that their own needs be met first. They no longer guarantee protection, but instead, threaten each other unless their demands are met. When demands are not met, the Taker resorts to disrespectful judgments, and when that doesn't work, out come the armaments. Angry outbursts are the Taker's last-ditch effort to solve the problem.

In the state of Conflict, conversation tends to be disrespectful, resentful and even hateful. Mutual care and concern have been replaced by mutual self-centeredness. Your Taker no longer trusts your spouse to look after your interests, but pulls out all the stops to see to it that you are treated fairly. The problem, of course, is that your Taker does not know how to treat your spouse with that same fairness. Fairness is viewed by the Taker as getting its way at all costs.

In the state of Conflict, couples are still emotionally bonded and that makes the pain of thoughtlessness even worse. Love units are withdrawn at a very fast rate. They may still hope that the hurting will stop and there will be a return to the state of Intimacy, but they don't trust each other to stop the madness. Occasionally, one spouse may revert to the state of Intimacy, but if peace is to return, they must both do it simultaneously. The only way to calm down both spouse's Takers is for both of them to be protected at the same time.

Couples can return to the state of Intimacy from Conflict, if, and only if, they stop hurting each other and return to meeting each other's emotional needs again.

But it's very difficult to be thoughtful in the state of Conflict, because your Taker urges you to return pain whenever you receive it. So for most couples, the state of Conflict inspires them to think with short-sightedness. Instead of wanting to meet each other's needs, they want their own needs met before they'll do anything. That makes resolving the conflict seem almost impossible, because our Takers would rather fight than try to make the other spouse happy.

Negotiations in the state of Intimacy really don't work, because each spouse is trying to out-give each other. Sooner or later, one spouse feels used by the arrangement. It's not what I consider bargaining -- it's like giving away the store!

However, negotiations in the state of Conflict don't work either. Each spouse is trying to out-take each other. There is no effort to make the other spouse happy, only the self-centered effort of pleasing yourself at the other person's expense -- it's like robbing the bank.



When a husband and wife are in the state of Conflict long enough, the resentment and disillusionment they experience eventually convinces their Takers that fighting doesn't work. A new approach is warranted, and that approach ushers in the the third state of mind in marriage, Withdrawal.

The Third State of Mind in Marriage:

[Withdrawal](#)

The Three States of Mind in Marriage

The Third State of Mind: Withdrawal

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3615_state.html

Reason would dictate that demands, disrespect and anger are not the way to resolve conflicts in marriage. But with the Giver and Taker as the only instinctive alternatives, reason doesn't play much of a role in marital problem-solving. Instead, mood is almost everything, and after a fight, most couples do not feel much like going back to the rule of the Giver.

So they leave the Taker in charge, and the Taker adopts a new approach. In the state of Conflict it's strategy is fight. But in the state of Withdrawal, it's strategy is flight.

When you're in the state of Conflict, your Taker tries to force your spouse to meet your needs, making demands, showing disrespect, and threatening your spouse with angry outbursts to get its way. But if that doesn't work--if your spouse does not meet your needs--your Taker suggests a new approach to the problem: Withdrawal. It tries to convince you that your spouse is not worth the effort, and you should engage in emotional divorce.

In the state of Withdrawal, spouses no longer feel emotionally bonded or in love, and emotional defenses are raised. Neither one wants to try to meet the other's needs, and both have given up on attempts to get their own needs met by the other. One becomes two. They are completely independent, united only in living arrangements, finances and childrearing, although they often have to keep up appearances for neighbors and friends.

When one spouse enters the state of Withdrawal, the other usually follows. After all, what is the point? If she is meeting none of his needs and rebuffing every effort he makes to meet hers, he might as well give up, too. The thoughtless behavior by each spouse toward the other becomes too great to bear, so they stop caring. Trust is a faint memory.

Emotional needs can be met only when we are emotionally vulnerable to someone who meets those needs. When we are in the state of Withdrawal, our emotional needs cannot be met because we've raised our defenses. Even when a spouse tries to meet an emotional need, the defensive wall blunts the effect to prevent any Love Bank deposits.

Couples in Withdrawal are really in a state of emotional divorce. When they've been in Withdrawal for any length of time, they will sleep in separate rooms, take separate vacations, and eat meals at different times. They will not communicate unless they must. If that doesn't work, they either separate or obtain a legal divorce.

I've already explained that the states of Intimacy and Conflict discourage negotiating. But in the state of Withdrawal there isn't the slightest interest in it. In Intimacy, couples must only ask in order to receive. In Conflict, they fight to try to get what they want, and the bargain is usually less than intelligent. But in Withdrawal, there is no discussion, no bargaining, not even arguing. In that state, a spouse is unwilling to do anything for his or her spouse or let the spouse do anything in return.

When a couple is in the state of Withdrawal, the marriage seems hopeless. There is no willingness to be thoughtful or to meet each other's emotional needs, and no willingness to even talk about the problems. When both spouses are in the state of Withdrawal, at that point in time, it really is hopeless, because neither are at all interested in saving the marriage.

But the state of Withdrawal doesn't usually last very long. Sooner than most couples think, at least one spouse has the presence of mind to try to break the deadlock. When that happens, it's possible for that spouse to lead the other all the way back to the state of Intimacy. But it's possible only if the Giver and Taker are relegated to the back room.

Next:

[How one spouse can lead the other back to Intimacy](#)

The Three States of Mind in Marriage

How One Spouse Can Lead the other Back to Intimacy

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3620_state.html

Marriage partners do not necessarily experience the same state of mind in marriage at the same time. One spouse may disrupt the other's state of Intimacy by failing to meet an emotional need, or inadvertent thoughtlessness. In the state of Conflict, the offended spouse begins to complain, nag, and may even try to start a fight. As the complaints escalate, the other spouse who has been in the state of Intimacy, is dragged into the state of Conflict as well, and then the fighting begins in earnest.

Typically, if they fail in their efforts to resolve the conflict, and if the unpleasant effects escalate, one spouse will go into Withdrawal first and raise his or her emotional barriers. The spouse that remains in the state of Conflict continues to argue, while the withdrawn spouse tries to escape. If the arguing spouse persists, the withdrawn spouse may be goaded to re-enter the Conflict state, and fight back. Or, the arguing spouse may give up and enter the Withdrawal state, too.

One spouse may also lead the other on the road back from Withdrawal to Conflict and eventually to back to Intimacy. In Withdrawal, a husband may decide to make a new effort to restore Intimacy and toss out an olive branch. That effort places him back into the Conflict state, while his wife is still in Withdrawal.

Suppose his effort is an encouragement to her and she eventually joins him in the state of Conflict. Now they are both willing to have their needs met by the other, but their Takers encourage them to fight about it, rather than negotiate intelligently and peacefully. In all too many cases, if they follow their Taker's advice and argue rather than negotiate, they both find themselves back in the state of Withdrawal, convinced that in that state their marriage is safer, and certainly more peaceful.

But this step from Withdrawal to Conflict is a step in the right direction, and provides spouses an opportunity to regain Intimacy -- if they can resist the advice of their Takers. Withdrawal may seem more peaceful, but it is actually a shuttering down of the marriage. A return to the state of Conflict is a sign that the partners have restored hope -- the marriage is worth fighting over. By coming out of Withdrawal, they are lowering their emotional defenses and taking the risk of getting close to each other again.

While demanding and arguing is instinctive in the state of Conflict, one spouse can lead the other back to Intimacy by resisting the Taker's temptation to fight. It takes two to argue, and if one spouse makes an effort to avoid making demands and judgmental statements, and tries to be thoughtful and meet the other's needs, the other spouse usually calms down and does the same thing.

Once they see each other's caring efforts, and rebuild their Love Bank accounts, they re-enter the Intimacy stage. But there's an irony that trips up some couples. Which spouse do you think is the first to move back into the state of Intimacy: the one who makes the first effort to meet the other's needs, or the recipient of that effort? You may have guessed it. The recipient of care is usually the first to return to the state of intimacy, and not the one who make the greatest effort to save the relationship.

If you set a good example by meeting your spouse's needs first, alas, that usually means that your own needs are met last. Your Taker is not pleased with this arrangement, and may try to sabotage it. You will need to make a deliberate and patient effort to override the Taker's instinct to retreat back to fighting and name-calling. But if you resist that instinct to argue, and instead focus attention on behaving thoughtfully and meeting your spouse's needs, your spouse will be encouraged to reciprocate.

Granted, when in the state of Conflict, it's much more difficult to be thoughtful and meet each other's emotional needs. That's because the Taker's advice dominates the Giver's advice, and the Taker isn't interested in thoughtfulness or meeting someone else's needs. So if you want to return to Intimacy, you must override this instinct with great effort. Meeting an emotional need in marriage is easy when you are in the state of Intimacy, because the Giver encourages you to do just that. But in the state of Conflict, it seems very unnatural and even unfair.

When your Love Bank balances are finally restored, and your love for each other is triggered again, the struggle is over. You will have returned to Intimacy, and along with it, everything you need to do for each other will seem almost effortless.

The passage from Intimacy, through Conflict, to Withdrawal is a slippery slope. You can get there before you know it. But it takes quite a bit of work to climb back up that hill. While one of you can help by pulling the other back up the hill, it's a lot easier when you both work together. And the best way to work yourselves back to Intimacy from Withdrawal and Conflict is by negotiating effectively.

My next concept is designed to help you negotiate in all three states of mind in marriage, when your instincts tell you to either give or take or even give up entirely. It's a rule that I want you use as a way to override the short-sighted advice of both your Giver and Taker. I call the rule the Policy of Joint Agreement.

Next Concept:

[The Policy of Joint Agreement](#)

The Policy of Joint Agreement

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3500_policy.html

When in the state of Intimacy, both spouses want the other to be happy, and neither spouse wants to see the other hurt. In the state of Conflict, both spouses want to be happy and neither wants to see themselves hurt. Actually, both objectives are important, and that's why I created a negotiating rule to achieve those important objectives regardless of the state of mind spouses happen to be in. I call it the Policy of Joint Agreement -- it takes the best from the advice of both our Giver and our Taker.

The Policy of Joint Agreement also avoids the worst advice of our Giver and Taker. In the state of Intimacy, we are encouraged by our Giver to sacrifice our own happiness so that the other person can be happy. In the state of Conflict, we are encouraged by our Taker to let our spouses sacrifice so that we can be happy. Neither of these are worthy objectives because in both cases someone gets hurt.

In marriage, your interests and your spouses interests should be considered simultaneously. One of you should not suffer for the benefit of the other, even willingly, because when either of you suffer, one is gaining at the other's expense. If you both care about each other, you will not let the other suffer so that you can have what you want. When you are willing to let the other sacrifice for you, you are momentarily lapsing into a state of selfishness that must somehow be corrected before damage is done. The Policy of Joint Agreement provides that correction.

Before I tell you what the Policy of Joint Agreement is, I want to warn you that when you read it for the first time you may think I'm crazy to be suggesting such a rule. But the more you think about it, and the more you follow it in your marriage, the more you will recognize it as the breakthrough you need in the logjam that the Giver and Taker create in marriage.

The Policy of Joint Agreement

Never do anything without an enthusiastic agreement between you and your spouse

When you follow this policy, your Giver likes the part of it that requires your spouse to be in enthusiastic agreement about every decision you make, and your Taker likes the part that requires you to be in enthusiastic agreement. But the Giver will think that you're being selfish when you don't do whatever it takes to make your spouse happy, and your Taker will think you are just plain dumb to let your spouse's lack of "enthusiasm" prevent you from doing whatever makes you happy. Yet, if you follow this rule, it will prevent you from giving so much that it hurts you, or taking so much that you hurt your spouse. It forces you into the balance you need in marriage to create and sustain a compatible lifestyle and the feeling of love.

This rule teaches couples to become thoughtful and sensitive to each other's feelings when they don't feel like it. If both spouses follow this policy, they avoid all the Love Busters because they won't mutually agree to anything that hurts one of them. Demands, disrespect and anger are eliminated because even negotiating strategy must be mutually agreed to, and no one likes to be the recipient of abuse. Annoying behavior is eliminated because if one spouse finds any behavior or activity of the other annoying, according to the policy, it cannot be done. It even eliminates dishonesty, because a lie is certainly not something that you would agree to enthusiastically. It helps plug up the holes in the sieve of the Love Bank that cause most couples to drift into loveless incompatibility.

It also forces couples to negotiate fairly. The Policy itself prevents either spouse from making unilateral decisions about anything, so they must discuss every decision they make before action can be taken. Demands are out of the question, because they are not made to create enthusiastic agreement -- they are made to force one spouse to lose so that the other can gain. The same can be said for Disrespectful Judgments and Angry Outbursts. What role do any of those Love Busters have in a discussion where the goal is enthusiastic agreement? In their place, each spouse learns to make requests and express opinions, showing respect for the other spouse's opinions. The sheer folly and stupidity of demands, disrespect and anger are vividly demonstrated when a mutually enthusiastic agreement is your goal.

Successful negotiation in marriage creates a solution to every problem that benefits both spouses and doesn't hurt either of them. The Policy of Joint Agreement forces a couple to find those solutions. None of the states of mind in marriage encourage them to do that, so they need this rule to override their instincts that prevent successful negotiation.

The Policy of Joint Agreement encourages couples to consider each other's happiness as equally important. They are a team and both should try to help each other and avoid hurting each other. It just makes good sense. Why should one spouse consider their own interests so important that he or she can run roughshod over the interests of the other? It's a formula for marital disaster, and yet some of the most well-intentioned couples do it from their honeymoon on.

When I first see a couple in marital crisis, they are usually very incompatible. They are living their lives as if the other hardly exists -- making thoughtless decisions regularly because they don't care how the other feels. As a result, when I introduce The Policy of Joint Agreement, it seems almost impossible to follow. They have created a way of life that is based on so many inconsiderate habits that it seems the policy would force them to stop all their activity -- so much of what they do is thoughtless and insensitive.

But once they start to follow the policy, it becomes easier and easier to come to an agreement. As they throw out their thoughtless habits and activities one by one, they replace them with habits and activities that take each other's feelings into account. That's what compatibility is all about -- building a way of life that is comfortable for both spouses. When they create a lifestyle that they each enjoy and appreciate, they build compatibility into their marriages.

But the most powerful incentive for following this policy is that it helps sustain the feeling of love. Once the Policy of Joint Agreement is acted upon, it helps insulate a couple from many of the destructive forces that are ruining marriages. And it helps couples learn to meet each other's needs in ways that are mutually fulfilling and enjoyable. Spouses that follow this policy and meet each other's needs fall in love and stay in love with each other.

As I already mentioned, negotiation is very tough in marriage because each state of mind, Intimacy, Conflict and Withdrawal, tends to discourage negotiation. But the Policy of Joint Agreement can help us override our instincts, and enable us to negotiate fairly regardless of our state of mind. That's because "enthusiastic" agreement is the goal, as opposed to "reluctant" agreement.

In the state of Intimacy, our Giver would agree to almost anything if it would make our spouse happy. But it would not be an enthusiastic agreement -- it would be a self-sacrificing, suffering-servant kind of agreement. Only our Taker is capable of "enthusiastic" agreements, because it's only enthusiastic about something that's in our own best interest. If you and your spouse are in enthusiastic agreement, it means that both of your Takers agree that the decision is in your best interests. Those are the agreements that are most likely to make you both happy.

In this short introduction to the Policy of Joint Agreement, I have presented a broad panorama of what it is, why it's so important in marriage, and how you should apply it in your marriage. But there are many details I've left out of this introduction that I describe more completely in the Q&A section of this web site. To make it easier to find these columns and answer some of the questions you might have at this very moment, I will describe some of those that are most relevant to the subject, negotiating with the Policy of Joint Agreement.

Q&A Columns Regarding the Policy of Joint Agreement

All marital conflicts are opportunities to negotiate. And when done correctly, with the Policy of Joint Agreement, most marital problems are relatively easy to solve. But I have received many letters wondering if this policy is reasonable. Can a husband and wife be expected to agree on everything? And enthusiastically? So I posted the column,

Incompatibility is at the core of marital conflict. [How to Survive Incompatibility](#) is a Q&A column I've posted that introduces the problem of incompatibility, and offers the Policy of Joint Agreement as a general solution. The problem of incompatibility and the solution are readdressed in [Following the Policy of Joint Agreement When You're VERY Incompatible](#).

What happens when the Policy of Joint Agreement is not followed in marriage? Disaster! And the disaster is seen in many forms. One of its most common forms is a Love Buster I have already introduced to you, annoying behavior. To refresh your memory, an annoying behavior is any habit or activity that one spouse does that bothers the other spouse. It may not seem like much of a disaster when annoying behavior is in its early stages, but there are many examples of it growing into ugly monsters. [How to Overcome Annoying Behavior](#) describes the seriousness of the problem and offers the Policy of Joint Agreement as the only reasonable solution.

One of annoying behavior's ugly monsters, drug and alcohol addiction, clearly creates marital disaster. If every couple followed the Policy of Joint Agreement, there would be very few alcoholic spouses. But without that rule, alcohol and drugs can sure wreck a marriage. [What to Do with an Alcoholic Spouse](#) is a column that addresses this common problem that has plagued marriages for thousands of years.

Negotiation assumes that two people are willing to resolve a conflict. But in many marriages, one spouse is not willing to negotiate, or follow the Policy of Joint Agreement, particularly when the marriage is in serious trouble. A commonly asked question is, how can one spouse negotiate when the other spouse is not interested? I have posted two Q&A columns on the subject: [Can a Marriage Be Saved by One Spouse \(Part 1\)](#), and [Can a Marriage Be Saved by One Spouse \(Part 2\)](#).

[Having Trouble with the Policy of Joint Agreement?](#) In this column I not only discuss the Policy of Joint Agreement, but I also describe Four Guidelines for Successful Negotiation, which is my 10th and final Basic Concept,

[Four Guidelines for Successful Negotiation](#)

Four Guidelines for Successful Negotiation

http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3350_guide.html

Let's begin with the assumption that you and your spouse do not agree about something. It may be about how to meet an unmet need, or about overcoming a thoughtless habit that is bothering one of you. In fact, it may be about anything that has become a conflict.

Chances are that you have been responding to this issue in one of three ways: 1) ignoring your own feelings and doing it your spouse's way, 2) ignoring your spouse's feelings and doing it your way, or 3) ignoring the problem entirely. Negotiation, however, requires something very different--taking your feelings and the feelings of your spouse into account simultaneously. The following guidelines will help you achieve that very important objective:

Guideline 1: Set ground rules to make negotiation pleasant and safe.

Most couples view negotiation as a trip to the torture chamber. That's because their efforts are usually fruitless, and they come away from the experience battered and bruised. Who wants to negotiate when you have nothing but disappointment and pain to look forward to?

So before you begin to negotiate, set some basic ground rules to make sure that you both enjoy the experience. Why? Because you repeat activities that you like, and avoid those you don't like. Since you should negotiate as often as a conflict arises, it should always be an enjoyable experience so you make it a regular part of your married life.

To be certain that you will have a pleasant and safe negotiating environment, I suggest three ground rules.

Ground Rule #1:

Try to be pleasant and cheerful throughout negotiations

It's fairly easy to start discussing an issue while in a good mood. But negotiations can open a can of worms, so be prepared for negative emotional reactions. Your spouse may begin to feel uncomfortable about something you say. In fact, out of the clear blue, he or she may inform you that there will be no further discussion.

I know how upset and defensive couples can become when they first tell each other how they feel about the way they have been treated by each other. That's why I first coach them individually to prepare them for negative comments. I simply tell them what I am telling you--try to be as positive and cheerful as you can be, especially if your spouse says something that offends you.

Ground Rule #2:

Put safety first--do not make demands, show disrespect,
or become angry when you negotiate, even if your spouse
makes demands, shows disrespect, or becomes angry with you

Once the cat is out of the bag and you have told each other what is bothering you or what you want, you have entered one of the most dangerous phases of negotiation. If your feelings have been hurt, you are tempted to retaliate. Your Taker is very persuasive at this point, and unless you make a special effort to resist its advice, your negotiation will turn into an argument. But if you can keep each other safe, you will be able to use your intelligence to help you make the changes you both need.

Ground Rule #3:

If you reach an impasse where you do not seem to be
getting anywhere, or if one of you is starting
to make demands, show disrespect, or become angry,
stop negotiating and come back to the issue later.

Just because you can't resolve a problem at a particular point in time doesn't mean you can't find an intelligent solution in the future. Don't let an impasse prevent you from giving yourself a chance to think about the issue. Let it incubate for a while, and you'll be amazed what your mind can do.

If your negotiation turns sour, and one of you succumbs to the temptation of the Taker with demands, disrespect or anger, end the discussion by changing the subject to something more pleasant. After a brief pause, your spouse may apologize and wish to return to the subject that was so upsetting. But don't go back into the minefield until it has been swept clear of mines. The mines, of course, are demands, disrespect and anger, and you must discuss how to avoid them before you return to the issue. You can't negotiate if your Takers' destructive instincts control your discussion.

Guideline 2: Identify the problem from both perspectives.

Once you have set ground rules that guarantee a safe and enjoyable discussion, you are ready to negotiate. But where do you begin? First, you must understand the problem from the perspectives of both you and your spouse.

Most couples go into marital negotiation without doing their homework. They don't fully understand the conflict itself, nor do they understand each other's perspectives. In many cases, they are not even sure what they really want.

One of the responsibilities of a marriage counselor is to help couples clarify the issues that separate them. I'm amazed at how often the clarification itself solves the problem. "Oh, that's what we've been fighting about!" many couples say. And once they understand the issue and each other's opinions, they realize that the conflict is not as serious as they thought. Or when the issue is clarified, the solution is immediately apparent and the conflict is resolved.

Respect is the key to success in this phase of negotiation. Once the issue has been identified, and you hear each other's perspectives, it is extremely important to understand each other--not try to straighten each other out. Remember that your goal is enthusiastic agreement, and there is no way you will be enthusiastic if you reject each other's perspectives. In fact, the only way you will reach an enthusiastic agreement is if you not only understand each other, but also come up with a solution that accommodates each other's perspectives.

It's so much easier to negotiate the right way when your goal is enthusiastic agreement. It eliminates all the strategies that attempt to wear each other down with abuse. You may as well forget about demands because they never lead to an enthusiastic agreement. The same can be said for disrespectful judgments and angry outbursts. If you are looking for real solutions to your problem, you will find them in whatever yields an enthusiastic agreement.

But when I take demands, disrespect and anger away from some couples, they are left feeling naked. They don't know how to discuss an issue if they can't demand, show disrespect or express their anger. And without those Love Busters they often feel hopeless about resolving their problems, because they have rarely approached their problems with the goal of finding a win-win solution. And they simply don't know how to do it. It's as if the only way they know how to communicate in marriage is through demands, disrespect and anger. Is that true of you and your spouse?

If so, remember that with practice you will begin to feel more comfortable approaching every conflict with the goal of mutual agreement. You learn to ask each other questions, not to embarrass each other but to gain a fuller understanding of what it would take to make each other happy. And when you think you have the information you need to consider win-win solutions, you are ready for the next step.

Guideline 3: Brainstorm with abandon.

You've set the ground rules. You've identified the problem from each other's perspective. Now you're ready for the creative part--looking for solutions that you think will make you both happy. I know that can seem impossible if you and your spouse have drifted into incompatibility. But the climb back to Intimacy has to start somewhere, and if you put your minds to it, you'll think of options that please you both.

The secret to understanding your spouse is to think like your spouse's Taker. It's easy to appeal to your spouse's Giver. "If she really loves me, she'll let me do this." or "He'll be thoughtful enough to agree with that, I'm sure." But lasting peace must be forged with your spouse's Taker, so your solutions must appeal to your spouse's most selfish instincts. At the same time, it must also appeal to your own selfish instincts.

When you brainstorm, quantity is often more important than quality. Let your minds run wild; go with just about any thought that might satisfy both of your Takers. If you let your creative side run free, you are more likely to find a lasting solution.

Carry a pad of paper or a pocket notebook, with you so you can write down ideas as you think of them throughout the day. Some problems may require days of thought, and pages of ideas. But keep in mind your goal—a solution that would appeal to both of your Takers.

Resist one type of solution that your Giver and Taker may suggest the "I'll let you do what you want this time if you let me do what I want next time" solution. For example, imagine that you want to go out with your friends after work, leaving your spouse with the children. So to arrive at an enthusiastic agreement for that thoughtless activity, you suggest that you take the children another night so that your spouse can go out with his or her friends.

What you're really proposing here is that each of you will sacrifice so that the other can have fun. The problem with that arrangement is that you are agreeing to behavior that makes one of you unhappy whenever the other is happy, and as I've said earlier, once you have made an agreement, it can easily turn into a habit.

The Giver and Taker suggest those kinds of win-lose solutions because they don't understand win-win solutions. Their concept of fairness is that if you are both suffering equally, that's fair. My view of negotiation is that by the time you are finished you should have arrived at a solution where neither of you suffers. And each part of the solution should not require either of you to sacrifice so that the other can be happy.

Guideline 4: Choose the solution that meets the conditions of the Policy of Joint Agreement -- mutual and enthusiastic agreement.

After brainstorming, you will have come up with some good and some bad solutions. Now you need to sort through them. Good solutions are those both you and your spouse consider desirable. In other words they meet the conditions of the Policy of Joint Agreement. Bad solutions, on the other hand, only take the feelings of one spouse into account at the expense of the other. The best solution is the one that makes you and your spouse most enthusiastic.

Many problems are relatively easy to solve. You will be amazed at how quickly you can find an enthusiastic agreement to some problems when you have decided to hold off on any action until you both agree. That's because when you know you must take each other's feelings into account, you become increasingly aware of what it will take to reach a mutual agreement. Instead of considering options that are clearly not in your spouse's best interest, you reject them immediately and begin to think of options you know would make both you and your spouse happy. It's amazing how smart you can be when you direct your mind to find smart solutions.

For example, consider the situation we mentioned above. You would like to go out with your friends after work, leaving your spouse with the children. Before you had agreed to the Policy of Joint Agreement, you may have simply called your spouse to say you would be late, or worse yet, arrived home late without having called. But now, you must come to an enthusiastic agreement prior to the event. It certainly restricts your freedom of choice, but on the other hand, it protects your spouse from your thoughtless behavior.

After having presented your case, you would probably hear immediate objections. Your spouse might feel that he or she does not appreciate your having fun while he or she is home battling the kids. "Besides," your spouse might mention, "our leisure activities should be with each other." In response, you might suggest that your spouse drop the kids off at your parents' (which you will call to make the arrangements) and join you.

If you and your spouse can enthusiastically agree on that suggestion, you are home free. Your parents take your children for a couple of hours, and your spouse joins you wherever it was you were planning to meet your friends. Problem solved. In fact, if going out after work with friends becomes a regular event, you can plan ahead for it by arranging the child-care in advance.

Of course, other problems can be very difficult to solve, involving many steps. Learning how to meet each other's emotional needs, for example, can require quite a bit of trial and error, along with the time and energy it takes to create the habits that eventually make meeting a need almost effortless. If one of you struggles with an addiction, you will find that the Policy of Joint Agreement simply cannot be followed at all until you have overcome the addiction. Whether it's drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, or any other addiction, you will find that thoughtfulness is almost impossible to practice as long as you are addicted. You must sweep the addiction completely out of your life before you will be able to negotiate in the way I have suggested.

When a couple has tried to follow my advice, but can't seem to negotiate with each other regardless of how hard they try, addiction is usually the culprit. In fact, a good way to determine if you are addicted to a substance or activity is to see if you can follow the Policy of Joint Agreement after you have agreed to it. If

you find you can't, chances are, you're an addict. If you follow the guidelines I have suggested, negotiation can be an enjoyable way to learn about each other. And if you avoid unpleasant scenes and negotiate to an enthusiastic agreement, you can resolve with relative ease all of the many conflicts you will have throughout life.

One last point: Whenever a conflict arises, keep in mind the importance of depositing as many love units as possible while avoiding withdrawals. In other words, use the opportunity to find a solution that will make your spouse happy, and avoid solutions that make either of you unhappy.

I have now presented all of my basic concepts. But you may want to review them quickly. So I have summarized them all in the next section.

[A Brief Summary of
Dr. Harley's Basic Concepts](#)