

Couple's Workbook

Making Your Relationship Work

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

How can you overcome challenges in your relationship?

Learn to think like a couple's therapist.

Relationships take work. This book will show you how to resolve conflict, improve communication, connect and grow love in a healthy way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my wife Elizabeth, our daughter Nola, son Alexander. My parents for showing me what a healthy loving relationship looks like and my entire supportive family. My colleagues and patients for their support and trust in my work. Lastly, I would not be on this path if it were not for God's grace and endless blessings.

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Making Your Relationship Work

Exercise 1

In with the new

This exercise is to be initiated individually and later discussed together. Do not complete the exercise together until you have read steps 1 through 5

Step 1:

Create a list of all the changes that you want your partner to make for the relationship to work. Be honest to yourself and to the relationship. When considering changes, focus on behaviors and communication styles.

Common changes that I have seen discussed include:

- Being more attentive
- Feeling cherished
- Feeling loved
- Listening
- Less Argument

Step 2:

Now that you have the changes written down. Write down how you envision your partner to

carry out the change. When doing so consider verbal and nonverbal language.

Below is an example:

I want you to be more attentive towards me. For instance, when I am speaking to you at night in bed. I want you to look at me and be present during the conversations. In the past, you stayed on your phone and hardly made eye contact with me. I want you to please make eye contact with me.

In the example above, the core behavior needing change is attention or showing your partner attention.

SIDE NOTE

Often the act of showing attention can be described as feeling noticed, valued or important. It is vital to remember that in a relationship you are collaboratively coaching each other towards growth.

Step 3:

Time to transition the activity from individual to working together.

At this point, I want you to set up a time and place to communicate with your partner and go over what you have completed so far. When picking a time and place, be mindful that a distraction free and neutral location will strengthen the success of the activity and your ability to communicate.

Step 4:

At this point you have a solid understanding of the change(s) that need to be made and expectation around the change.

Communicate with your partner to create a platform that allows opportunities for the changes to take place.

For instance, if you are seeking for your partner to be more attentive towards you. Identify opportunities that allow the person to work towards change.

Below is an example:

Opportunities for change:

- *At night while in bed.*
- *While eating a meal together.*
- *During a walk.*

All the above examples are opportunities in which you can practice providing supportive attention to your partner.

Step 5:

Praise your partner with frequent reminders of what they are doing right. During this time of change and praise it is important that you provide your partner with feedback.

- Let them know when they have acted on a new behavior that you sought out.

- Allow them to know how their changes make you feel presently compared to the past.
- Provide your partner with reminders on the changes.

You have now read over steps 1 through 5. At this point you have the foundation to creating change in your relationship. What needs to come next is proactivity.

It is vital to the growth of your relationship, that you and your opportunity actively work on this exercise as laid out.

Exercise 2

Why results matter

It's easy to get caught up in the aspects of life that upset us within our relationship.

Sometimes we simply overlook the positive moments because we are so clouded by the negative ones.

Your first exercise focused on showing your partner the changes they can make to create a stronger and healthier relationship. If you followed the activity correctly, you should be actively witnessing changes in the relationship. The changes should be providing positive feedback to you and your partner.

If not, I want you to go back to exercise 1 and focus on one central obstacle in the relationship. Just one. Then start over from step 1.

Exercise 2 focus is on measuring results from exercise 1. To measure the results, I want you to explore the following:

- Have the changes that my partner made improved the overall relationship?
- Have the changes impacted how you view yourself?
- Have the changes impacted how you view your partner?

- Considering the change(s) that have taken place. How has the relationship changed?
- Are your needs being met?
- Are your wants being met?

The goal for this exercise is self-awareness. Creating understanding of what strategies are being implemented in the relationship and if they are effective. Overall, any positive change is progress.

Allow small changes to guide your confidence in working harder in your relationship.

Exercise 3

Appreciation is key

During this exercise, I ask that you and your partner agree to 3 things:

1. Set up a time to meet face to face.
2. Agree to show each other patience and respect during the activity.
3. Agree to truly invest in the activity.

During the exercise, you and your partner are going to take turns sharing what you appreciate from each other. When disclosing what, you appreciate focus your response to the following:

- Disclose what you appreciate about your partner.
- Disclose how the act you appreciate impacts you.
- Disclose how the act you appreciate impacts the relationship.

Below are two examples that focus on the appreciation exercise. Use it as guidance in the activity:

Example 1:

I appreciate that you always think about me and my needs. When you think about me, it makes me feel valued and important in your eyes. When I envision my ideal relationship, it must be with someone that is willing to consider my needs.

Example 2:

I really appreciate how willing you are to always give me a hug or a kiss for no reason. When you kiss, or hug me, I feel seen. I feel that, on a physical level, my needs are met. The person I want to be with must be willing to hug me, kiss me or touch me in some way.

This exercise should be continued at a pace of at least one time per week. I want to encourage you to continue to work on your relationship through appreciation.

Exercise 4

Core values

The funny thing about relationships is that they are often treated as a milestone. When I think of a milestone, the idea of college graduation or turning 18 comes to mind. A milestone, is simply a significant stage of life that one meets.

As mentioned earlier, the funny thing about relationships is that we often treat them as a milestone. Relationships in no way should be treated as a milestone. Simply because relationships are forever evolving, growing, and changing.

Work must always be applied to relationships.

Plain and simple.

Exercise 4 focuses on revisiting the core growth of your relationship. Think about the sparks in your relationship that created lasting changes or beautiful memories. You may consider small acts of kindness, such as when your partner “used to” send you sweet messages in the morning. Or when your partner, surprised you on Thursday “just because it was Thursday”.

What tends to happen is that, as mentioned earlier, relationships are treated as milestones. What generated growth in the relationship becomes a phase of the past and distant

memory to simply remanence on. Versus a reminder of acts that should be continued.

Below are simple steps to follow as you process through exercise 4:

Step 1:

Write down core acts, gestures, or behaviors that your partner “used” to do early in the relationship. Only pick out the ones that you feel enrich and grow your relationship.

Step 2:

Present the information to your partner.

Step 3:

At this point, you and your partner should be reviewing the information. I want each of you to pick 1 or 2, to start doing for one week.

Step 4:

As the week progresses, and acts, gestures or behaviors are being completed, be sure to provide your partner guidance and support. This simply means that when your partner is following through and “doing a good job”, you let them know by:

- Expressing how you feel now versus in the past.
- Express how the change is impacting the relationship.

Step 5:

Maintenance. During this step, I simply want you to continue to add more and more acts, gestures, or behaviors to your agenda. Continue to provide feedback and support to your partner.

The goal is that you can retrain yourself and create a healthy change that enriches the relationship and the love you hold for each other.

Exercise 5

Identifying the alpha dog

Most relationships have an alpha dog. One person that calls most of the shots. You may be thinking to yourself, “*No... we share equal roles and responsibilities*”.

Before giving up on the exercise, I want you write down all ways you are a leader in the relationship.

Examples may include:

- Planning trips. (example: “I am the one the plans the trips”)
- Taking care of bills.
- Arranging family or friend’s activities.
- Setting up schedules for the kids.
- Grocery shopping.
- Taking care of the house and household duties.

The goal of the exercise is for you to identify if you are the alpha in the relationship and if you feel that being the alpha is negatively impacting your relationship or your personal self.

So what exactly does “negatively impacting look like”?

This can mean any of the following:

- Feeling stressed and overly consumed with your role in the relationship.
- Feeling “unfair”.
- Not having a healthy balance between work and personal life.
- Home not feeling like home. This simply means that you transition out of work and into home where you continue to have more work to do.

The list can truly go on. It is vital that you spend time reflecting on the alpha role as it may hurt the relationship or prevent growth.

Let's focus on two simple steps:

Step 1:

Together, with your partner, write down all the roles you play and responsibilities you have.

Step 2:

Identify who is the alpha in the relationship.

Step 3:

Using the list that you have written down, create a new plan that is focused on balance.

Write down the changes you would like to see in the roles and responsibilities. It is important

to be mindful of your partner's roles and responsibilities.

Step 4:

Discuss the new platform with your partner. The goal for the final step is to have balance in the relationship. Balance can create a healthy path of connection. Imagine coming home and having less responsibilities to do because your partner has provided support. Now instead of transitioning from working at your job to working at home, you and your partner can have fun. To engage in pleasurable activities together that nourish your relationship.

Exercise 6

Evaluation part I

Below are questions that you and your partner are to spend time going over. Please spend time exploring each answer.

1. Communication
 - a. Very satisfied
 - b. Moderately satisfied
 - c. Somewhat satisfied
2. Conflict resolution
 - a. Very satisfied
 - b. Moderately satisfied
 - c. Somewhat satisfied
3. Degree of emotional connection
 - a. Very satisfied
 - b. Moderately satisfied
 - c. Somewhat satisfied
4. Degree of physical connection
 - a. Very satisfied
 - b. Moderately satisfied

- c. Somewhat satisfied

5. Openness

- a. Very satisfied

- b. Moderately satisfied

- c. Somewhat satisfied

The goal of the evaluation exercise is for you and your partner to discuss the topics above and work to a solution. A solution simply means, finding satisfaction in the relationship within each of the 5 core areas.

You are more than welcome to add in sections. This is your relationship. The more work you put in the better the outcome.

Exercise 7

Evaluation part II

During this activity, you and your partner are to spend time going through each of the statements below.

If you feel that any of the statements listed below negatively impact your relationship, put a check mark in the blank.

1. ___ unfaithful
2. ___ conflict over money
3. ___ conflict over household chores
4. ___ intimacy
5. ___ different interest
6. ___ problems with sexual relationship
7. ___ acceptance
8. ___ feeling lonely
9. ___ being criticized
10. ___ feeling judged
11. ___ trust

After completing the above, you and your partner are to analyze each of the check marks with the goal focused towards a solution.

For instance, If I checked “feeling lonely”. My goal would be to explain the following to my partner:

- Why I feel lonely.
- Examples of past times I felt lonely.
- Actions (verbal and nonverbal) of my partner that trigger feelings of loneliness.
- When was the last time I did not feel lonely?
- What was the relationship like when I did not feel lonely?

Exercise 8

What's the problem

Often clients come seek couples counseling when things have really hit the floor. Literally, when it is the last straw.

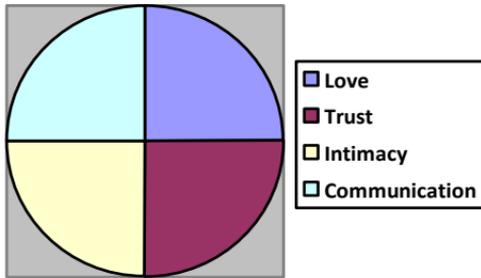
The first question, I ask clients is:

“What is the exact problem in your relationship”.

Often clients do one of two things: (1) sit back on the question and fall into silence. A silence of insecurity due to not allowing themselves to focus on the “specific problems” versus the person (2) begin a word vomit of anything and everything hurting the relationship.

A simple yet powerful notion to remember, it is much easier to target a person for a specific part then as a whole. Consider the pie chart below.

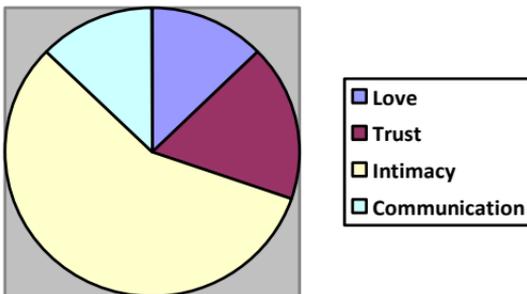
Figure 1:



For example, let's just focus on the four core areas in the pie chart: love, trust, intimacy and communication.

Instead of looking at your relationship pie, focus on specific areas that are problematic. Using the pie chart in figure 1, you can note that each of the four core areas are equal. Whereas, in the figure 2 they are not.

Figure 2:



It would make sense for a couple in figure 2 to experience far more satisfaction in intimacy than love, trust or communication. This can be noted by the larger half of the chart.

During this exercise, the goal is to focus on clearly identifying the specific problem(s). Once the specific problem(s) are identified, the next step is to identify solutions. Below is a step by step sequence to identifying the specific problem(s) and creating healthy solutions.

Step 1:

Individually identify clear problems or issues in your relationship. It may be beneficial to focus the problem around behaviors. Such as:

Example 1: *“My partner lies to me regarding what he does after work”.*

Example 2: *“I don’t feel that my partner touches me the way I want to be touched”.*

Step 2:

Identify a past case for each of the specific problems that you have written down in step 1. Examples will help you and your partner understand the problem and create a path towards a healthy solution.

For instance:

Example 1: *“Last time you came home from work, you said that you came directly home.*

Today, you are telling me that you went to play basketball.”

Step 3:

Individually analyze the specific problem and the example you wrote down. Create an alternative that would benefit or support the relationship. Go through each of the problems you have written down and follow the same procedure.

For instance:

Example 1: “I would love if you would feel comfortable sharing your schedule with me. It would help in decreasing arguments and build trust. We can do this together by having a shared scheduling system. This way, you are aware of my schedule and I am of yours”.

Step 4:

Show your partner your work. Allow your partner to understand the specific problem you have pointed out, the example you have identified and the better alternative desired.

At this point, you and your partner have two options.

Option A:

Agree on the better alternative that was created and practice utilizing it in your relationship.

Option B:

Brainstorm a solution for the specific problem that you and your partner agree upon. Remember, the overall goal is to work towards a solution.

Not a “I win and you lose scenario”.

Exercise 9

Releasing past habits

I once worked with a couple who truly struggled at releasing past habits. One of the partners really had a hard time with naming calling. They would use derogatory names as a way of pushing buttons. The partner receiving the names would feel hurt, belittled, humiliated, and in many ways scared as to how the name calling may impact the future of the relationship.

I trust that no one wants a long-term relationship with someone who speaks to them in a negative fashion.

Our past habits are often tied to some sort of experience or event in our life. Something may have taken place during your adolescent years that impacts you today. Or an experience in the relationship could be the catalysis.

In this example, the couple had a rough history. A history filled with up and down cycles that continued to hurt the relationship. Name calling started as a cry for attention. Then to push buttons. And finally, it hit home, as a habit. A learned behavior that slid past the tongue without recognition.

If you are experiencing conflict or difficulties in your relationship due to past habits or issues, let's start a plan.

The exercised below is based upon overcoming the negative habit of hurtful talk such as name calling. As you gain skill in understanding how to utilize the step by step sequence, you can focus on personal difficulties impacting your relationship.

The plan starts with the overall message of commitment.

Step 1:

- Are you committed to your relationship?
- Are you committed to your partner?

The answers to these questions should be YES.

Yes, I am committed to my relationship.

Yes, I am committed to my partner.

The reason that we have spent time on commitment is to incline your ability to work on the relationship. The more you think about being actively and willingly committed the more likely you are to follow through.

Step 2:

- What is the past habit that continues to hurt your relationship?

- Why do you do it?
- What do you think provokes or triggers it?
- How does the past habit make you feel?
- How does the past habit make your partner feel?
- How does your partner generally react to the past habit?

Step 3:

If you have found the origin of the past habit, great. If not, it's okay. I do want to continue to encourage you to search for it. Identifying the origin can shed light as to why you do it.

Understanding why we do something, leads to not doing it anymore.

Step 4:

Sit down with your partner and engage in the following questions:

- What can you say in place of the past habit?

Ask your partner for replacement terms to use.

The goal is to create a new habit. A new way of communicating with your partner that is healthy, not harmful, and supportive.

It is very important to remember that old habits die hard. This means that you are going to struggle with using the healthy habits versus the unhealthy. It is important for your partner to be involved in the process as they will be your support system through the good and bad.

There will be days or occasions in which you will slip up. It is vital to focus on the commitment you have for your relationship and partner.

Step 5:

In this step, we focus on ways in which your partner can support you during the process of releasing unhealthy habits and taking on healthier ones. As well as strategies to increase your ability to utilize healthy habits.

Common ways your partner can support you:

When you slip up, your partner can be there to support you. Support can be displayed in any of the following ways:

- Accepting that mistakes will be made.
- Acknowledging that this is a new learning process and mistakes are bound to take place.
- Reflecting on the occasion that took place and working together to find a healthier way.

- When healthy habits are used. Reward your partner by expressing how the healthy option makes you feel versus the unhealthy.

Strategies to increase your ability to utilize healthy habits:

- Give yourself a few reminders on your phone of the goals you are attempting to achieve.
- Place sticky notes in your room or around the house to help you stay on task.
- Section out a time each day to reflect on the changes you are working to make.
- Review the progress.
- Spend time once per week reflecting with your partner on progress made. Focus on how the progress is in any way, small or large, supporting the relationship and each other.

Over time you and your partner will notice the beautiful impact of change. Healthy habits will replace those that create disconnect and tension. Commitment will continue to grow and empower the relationship.

Exercise 10

The power of forgiveness

Forgiveness is by far one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome. Imagine a balance beam. One side labeled “you” and the other “partner”.

When discussing forgiveness, more than half of the weight is on your side. On the internal side.

Years ago, I worked with a couple who from the outside seemed like the ideal candidate to separate. Multiple affairs, acts of dishonesty, and lack of communication. The couple had a habit of repeating harmful cycles.

This couple would go around the circle over and over. Literally going around the very obstacles and issues that hurt the relationship without solving them.

Forgiveness and understanding was what was missing in the relationship. The couple had not forgiven each other for their wrongful acts. In addition, each had not forgiven him/herself for personal actions that hurt the relationship.

As a counselor, I enjoy making complex subjects simple. I find that simplicity speaks louder to the audience and can often be more appreciated.

Part I:

Forgiveness is difficult to overcome because “I”. Meaning, “I” am not ready to forgive. Or “I” don’t think I could ever forgive.

Statements such as these are simply self-defeating.

How can someone overcome an obstacle when they are already fighting against themselves and the obstacle at hand.

Part II:

The second part of forgiveness is a mixture of not knowing if you are going to be able to love the person as you used to. Or if the relationship will be as it used to.

First, things first. The question you are asking is an unknown simply because before you landed on the answer it was an unknown.

Did I confuse you?

Reflect to when you first met your partner. Think about the first dates. The very beginning when you did not know what the future would be like. During the first dates, you had no idea that your love would grow. You also had no idea of what the love would be like.

Yet, after obstacles, we feel that we will not be able to go back to what we use to have.

What relationships used to have or will have in time is dependent on the course of the relationship. If you make the decision to actively work on your relationship, then growth will take place.

You can do this by shifting the “I” statements mentioned earlier to:

- “I will commit to my relationship”.
- “I will spend time with my partner”.
- “I will go on dates and push myself to be transparent”.
- “I will love as I want to be loved”.
- “I will treat my partner as I want to be treated”.
- “I will show my partner appreciation”.

When days are tough and nights are long, remember, relationships require work. Healthy supportive work that transitions tough days and long nights to peaceful days and restful nights.

Exercise 11

Focusing on the present

My brother, Eliseo, is an artist. The type that enjoys everything and anything about art. He has this divine ability to be still. When we were little, our parents would take us to the beach. He would spend hours upon hours focusing on a single drawing or painting. While the rest of the family ventured off to fish or swim. He has always had the incredible ability to, if I must say, stop time and focus on what's directly in front of him with the upmost attention.

Throughout this book, you have routinely heard me say that "relationships require work". They truly do. Don't ever forget that. Not for a moment. Not even when you feel utterly connected to your partner. As much of the reason you are connected is due to work.

I often encourage my patients and those willing to lend their ears to me, to focus on what's in front of you. For couple's this lesson is vital to the success and growth of the relationship.

Just as my brother blocks out the world and devotes his every fiber to his art. I encourage couples to do the same.

Let's look at a simple and often overlooked example. Think about the last time you went on a date.

- Did you spend any of the time distracted by your phone?
- Did you spend time daydreaming on an external subject? Maybe work or family related?

Next time you go on a date, I would love for you to focus on the date. I'm sure your partner would also love this. Focus on your partner.

My wife and I enjoy the outdoors. A good amount of our dates take place at parks or walking through trails. We spend time talking to each other. Talking about what we see or how we feel. By focusing on each other and what's in front of us, we are genuinely closer together and connected.

In all honesty, it wasn't always like this for my relationship. Just like your relationship, my relationship has and will continue to require work. I cannot tell you how many times in the past, going out with my wife and finding my eyes scrolling through social media. Or scanning over the menu while thinking about work.

The important factor to remember is that relationships take work. Get your hands dirty and just wait. Be patient. You and your partner will truly enjoy the rewards that come.

In addition, to focusing on the present, I also want to stress the importance of eliminating toxic topics during cohesive times. Cohesive

meaning times that are meant to be about you and your partner connecting. Not about family drama that has your blood pressure above the roof.

Below is a list that helps couples focus on the present and have healthier dates.

- Create a rule that phones must not be present. Unless it's an emergency related matter.
- Play games on dates that focus on learning more about each other. For instance, questions like "if we were stuck on a deserted island do you think we would survive?" Push to explore the question by making it fun.
- Have dates at different settings. More than likely a change of scene will spark (a) conversation (b) insecurities. Both are great.
- Spend time post the date reflecting on your experience with your partner. This will help increase your mindfulness to work harder on your relationship and grow with your partner.

Exercise 12

The same page

Couples often seek relationship counseling due to issues with being on the same page. Obstacles like finding a healthy way to live together while having two distinct schedules and external demands can create conflict.

Early in my career, I worked with a newlywed couple. The two brought so much love and emotion to the office and truly my life. They were in every way in love and in my opinion right for each other. The only issue was scheduling.

They had different jobs and families that required individual needs. One would head to one side of town for work while the other went the opposite way. They struggled to juggle home related tasks and financial responsibilities.

What the couple needed was simple. Something that would support their individual lifestyles and schedules while eliminating conflict in the relationship. They needed a scheduling system that focused on structure, organization and inclusion.

The problem the newlywed couple faced is similar to what most couples struggle with. Living with someone else is a challenge. Even

more of a challenge when different schedules and out of the home demands are required.

A favorable solution is the three-tier system. Before engaging in the system discussed below, please read through it for understanding.

Tier 1:

Allocate one day out of the week that requires you and your partner to meet and go over the weeks demands. During this time, everything and anything is discussed and written down. To eliminate errors, I strongly encourage writing down the content and marking it off as it's completed. Common content discussed include: work schedules, chores in the home, or whose cooking or what bills will be paid.

At first, this will seem like a lot. I'll be transparent with you; some parts may even feel like a waste of time. Do it anyways. Become familiar and comfortable with this system as the mission is to reduce conflict in the relationship.

Tier 2:

As you are going over all the requirements for the week. You will stumble on those that require assignment. For instance, chores or paying bills. Someone needs to oversee specific tasks. Tier two is meant to help couples distribute obligations in a healthy and equal manner.

Tier 3:

The last tier is reviewed at the end of the week prior to starting the process over. The purpose of review is to reflect on its success and challenges. Together go over what worked well versus what became a challenge. This tier further helps create clarity and understanding before moving to the next week.

After your first to second time engaging in the three-tier system, you and your partner should experience some of the following positive changes:

- Conflict reduction.
- Teamwork.
- Appreciation for each other.
- Increase in healthy communication.
- Feeling supported by your partner.
- Feeling that more is accomplished together versus individually.
- Feeling apart of each other's days.

Exercise 13

Taking on challenges

One of my favorite activities to encourage couples to do is taking on challenges that focus on relationship growth. This year, I came up with the 30-day relationship challenge. Simply put, each day has a different challenge that couples can take on.

More than likely you and your partner have some sort of habit or tradition you do at night. For my wife and I, we used to “religiously” watch Game of Thrones. It was like clockwork. We would have dinner, put the kids to bed, shower, and then Game of Throne time.

Habits have a background purpose. The content going on in the front end is simple. Two people watching a television show that they like. At the back end is the real content. The core to what is taking place. The backend has two people utilizing one activity to create connection. The television show aids the couple in having favorable conversations, experience new content together, share an experience, and so much more.

I love the backend detail, it’s really where change can take place.

To challenge your relationship, focus on activities that do more than just bring you two

together. Below is a list of challenges that you and your partner can take on.

Challenge 1: At night, prior to sleep, spend time telling your partner one thing you appreciate about them. Do this for 30 days.

Challenge 2: Create an intimate gesture that you and your partner can engage in daily. Maybe kissing or hugging each morning.

Funny story, at least to me. Much of what I give my couples to do in counseling, I take on. A while back, I was taking on challenge 2 described above. To routinely give my wife and kids a hug and kisses each day prior to leaving for work. One day I forgot due to picking up a phone call as I was packing the car. At work, as I was preparing for the day, I felt as if I had forgotten something. Moments later, I'm running out the office to my house. To kiss my wife and kids. I know it's funny and even over the top. Yet, the challenge helped to create a habit. Much like brushing your teeth. If you forget to do it, it'll feel wrong. The challenge also ensured that importance was placed on physical connection.

Challenge 3: One small act of kindness for 30 days. This can come in endless forms. Sending love filled text messages. Leaving the house spotless. Cleaning the car. A surprise lunch. Have fun with this challenge.

Challenge 4: Talk about your 1, 5 and 10-year plan. Ideally, I would love for you and your partner to be able to find a distraction free place or at least a setting that is comfortable. Talk about what your hopes and dreams are for the specific time frame. Discuss the goals you wish to see each other accomplish. Don't be afraid to dig deep.

Challenge 5: Have you read the five love languages? If not, that's okay. For this challenge, I want you and your partner together to go online and take the five love languages quiz. It's free and can be completed in less than 5 minutes. After taking the quiz, you are going to receive results describing how you accept love. The challenge in this activity is to talk to each other about the results of the quiz and evaluate if each have been providing the appropriate desired love. If not, you have some work to do. If so, keep on working.

Exercise 14

Over analyzing

I had the opportunity to work with a couple that “felt” they knew everything about each other. They “thought” that they could transform nonverbal messages to verbal when reading their partner. This led to destructive and hurtful arguments.

I, like many others, have experienced the thought that “I know exactly what she is thinking”. I look at her facial expression and come up with an idea of how she feels or what she is thinking.

This is a very natural process. We spend endless hours with our partner. We wake up with them, shower, fight, and so much more. Due to the simple fact that we spend time with them, we create a theory based around our ability to interpret nonverbal behaviors. We build an interpretation based upon an expression or gesture before allowing our partner to say what they need to say.

This can lead to trouble.

Sometimes reading our partner before communication can create a path of destruction. Not destruction like chaos. But tension and a potential room for conflict. Much of this book is aimed to reduce tension, conflict,

miscommunication, and create a guide to a healthier lasting relationship.

This exercise has a transparent message. If you are arguing because you or your partner are reading each other before communication takes place, STOP.

Stop and address it immediately by increasing communication. For instance, if you typically interpret your partner and then transition to conflict. Try this alternative instead.

When you feel that you are about to interpret your partner, transition to rephrasing your statement.

“I may be over reading your facial expression. But it seems like you are upset. Can you please tell me how you are feeling”?

By using the statement above, you are allowing your partner to increase communication and express their feelings. Remember, the opposite would have led to a guess being made and conflict rising.

This can be a very difficult and tiring activity. To create a structure that allows the change to take place in a healthy and comfortable manner, you can communicate on acceptance of each other’s interpretation.

For instance, to allow this exercise to work, you can accept what your partner says without combating it. The goals in doing this is to work

on honesty and taking your partner words and emotions as they are disclosed.

Below is an example:

Partner 1: *“I may be over reading your facial expression. But it seems like you are upset. Can you please tell me how you are feeling?”*

Partner 2: *“Thank you for asking first. Yes, you are misinterpreting it. I am actually thinking...”*

Partner 1: *“Thank you for being honest with me.”*

Before closing this exercise, it is vital to understand that many of the exercises in this book require effort from both parties. It takes two to make it work.

Exercise 15

New everything

Think about a beautiful memory that you cherish in your relationship.

- Where did it take place?
- Who was there?
- What did you do?
- How did it make you feel?
- How did it support the relationship?

New experiences help people feel pleasant emotions and create loving and lasting memories. They are also fun and entertaining.

For the next 30 days, I want to encourage you to engage in 30 different experiences. This means going to a different place, visiting new people, and simply engaging in new experiences together.

The engagements allow you to feel closer to your partner. New conversations will stir up.

This exercise is short, sweet, and to the point. It doesn't work if action isn't taken.

Exercise 16

Connecting and reconnecting

Early in the relationship, it almost seems easier to connect. We engage in new activities and experiences together with a faster and more consistent frequency.

I remember spending hours upon hours talking on the phone to my wife. What did we talk about? Probably everything and anything that came up. As time passed, we did what most couples do. Our long 2 to 3 hour conversations shifted to 10-minute talk taken during a work break.

It's normal, right?

I honestly think it is. At the early stages of the relationship, we lust after getting to know our partner inside and out. As the relationship progresses we feel confident in thinking that we know our partner inside and out.

The issue with the above understanding is that growth should not stop. Love grows and continues to grow.

Connecting and reconnecting to our partner takes place when we are willing to believe that growth is evergreen. When we, people in relationships, can see our relationship as a continuum, growth can continue to take place.

Imagine if you felt the itch of understanding and learning about your partner like that you felt early on the relationship forever. You would more than likely have a healthier relationship as the act of connection will continue to take place.

Below are recommendations aimed to help couples connect and reconnect.

- Engage in common activities. Think of something that the two of you would not do on a normal day basis. This could be fun...
- Play a board game.
- Explore the following questions: (a) what about us makes you feel confident in the future of our relationship? (b) what do you do alone that brings you happiness and balance in life? (c) how has your partner changed your perspective in life?
- Create a bucket list of places you want to visit in the next 6 months.
- Count all your blessings. The ones impacting you on an individual level and those impacting the relationship.
- Reflect on challenges you and your partner have overcome.
- Sign up for a couple's activity to attend. Consider cooking or dancing classes.

- Try to have gatherings with friends and family. Allowing others to see the success of the relationship often aids couples in feeling connected.
- Increase communication when you are not together. If you can't remember, use your phone as a reminder. Add 3 to 5 daily reminders on your phone telling you "send my partner a love message!"

Exercise 17

Making things happen

People can attain what they want if they choose to put all their energy and attention to it. Fear and doubt are often what stray's individuals away from the journey that they have committed to. The journey of loving their partner and desiring the success of the relationship.

At points in your journey, in your journey to the very best relationship, you will encounter real sweat. In relationships, you must work your butt off to fight for what you want. To work with your partner and have the same vision and mission in mind.

Below is a two-step system to make changes happen.

Step One:

Together, consider one, not two or a dozen problems. Just one. I want you to write down one problem your relationship is facing. Write it down right at the top of the problem.

Below, write down answers to the following:

- Your thoughts to what created the problem.
- Triggers that provoke the problem.

- Emotions or behaviors that led to the problem.
- Discuss the last example that led to the problem. Please be as specific and detailed as possible.

Step Two:

Let's transition to what you and your partner are currently doing to overcome the problem. If you have no solution, then let's focus on creating one.

Earlier you should have written down a lot of detail around the foundation of the problem. The details are a map aimed to help you see the problem and not feel overwhelmed with the conflict and tension coming from the problem.

If you are not finding answers, it's okay. One of the beauties of counseling is that it's much like the bag Mary Poppins carries around. There is a vast amount of ways to work through problems.

I want you to review the answers and reflect on it several times a week. Gain understanding around it to the point in which you can either anticipate actions or during the process of the problem stop yourself from continuing engagement.

Earlier I asked for you to make yourself more acquainted with the list below:

- Your thoughts to what created the problem.
- Triggers that provoke the problem.
- Emotions or behaviors that led to the problem.
- Discuss the last example that led to the problem. Please be as specific and detailed as possible.

Now I would like for you to add a simple habit to your daily schedule. Each day wake up with the same goal as your partner.

The goal is *“I want to wake up and treat my partner how I would love to be treated each day.”*

The simple answer here is treating your partner with love, compassion, and endless support. Wake up each day to make them smile. The more you continue to engage in this habit, the less the problem will appear as you are directly combating the problem with this goal.

Lastly, if you continue to feel a road block, I want to encourage you to commit to a friendly outreach to a local counselor.

Exercise 18

Investing in conversation

One conversation can go a tremendous way. Often the very problems we are facing are clear to those on the outside.

So, what is being asked here? I'm asking for you to engage in one of the following:

- Attend one counseling session individually with the focus on relationship support.
- Attend one couples counseling session.
- Reach out to a trusted unbiased person. A person that you and your partner find trust, compassion, and empathy in. If you are willing, allow this person to provide feedback to your relationship.
- Visit your church to speak with a pastor, priest or a support person. Focus on the relationship.

Exercise 19

Challenges and exploration part I

The last two chapters of this book are aimed to create healthy habits in the relationship while also focusing on opportunities of growth.

Below you will find tasks aimed to explore the relationship and create opportunities for healing, connection and growth.

- I trust you because
_____.
- Write down all the positives in your relationship.
- Tell your partner what specifically about them you fell in love with.
- Tell your partner what about them motivates you to do better and to be strong.
- I think that we are a good team because
_____.
- On your next date, go somewhere new.
- Do an act of kindness today. Yes today, there is still time.

Exercise 20

Challenges and exploration part II

- Write down 5 ways your partner makes you feel loved. Share these with your partner.
- Revisit the growth of your relationship. Talk about how the two of you met. What brought you together, discuss all of it.
- Share a cherished childhood story that has molded you.
- Share how your partner has molded you to a better person.
- Write down 3 goals you want to accomplish this year together as a couple.
- I feel that I am a supportive partner because
_____.
- Write down 5 behaviors your partner does for you which make you feel valued.

