

***IF YOU REALLY LOVED ME...YOU COULD READ MY MIND***

***How You And Your Partner Can Create A Life-Enhancing Relationship***

***by***

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Some professions, such as the health professions, law, accounting, engineering and most forms of private business attract people who are intelligent, rational, focused, disciplined and goal oriented. The nature of these professions is such that logic, clear disciplined thinking and timely efficient action are necessary for success. In personal relationships, however, these important intellectual attributes need to be supplemented with acceptance of subjectivity and a sincere respect and admiration for each other's unique perspectives on everything. It may not be wise or appropriate to be emotionally open in a professional setting but in personal relationships emotional openness is a prerequisite for self-awareness, resolution of personal issues, empathy for your self and for your partner, respectful listening, effective communication and for expressions of love and pleasure. The following article outlines key concepts, principles and creative tools to help enhance your relationship capabilities or those of some of your clients.

*If You Really Loved Me... You Could Read My Mind*, offers the perspectives, concepts, guidelines and creative tools that will help you and your partner create and sustain your own life-enhancing relationship. Long-term fulfilling relationships, which are more common than you might expect, have been studied quite extensively. The researchers, Kaslow and Robinson, interviewed numerous couples who had been, according to their self-reports, happily married for 25 to 45 years. The data from their survey was published in *The American Journal of Family Therapy* in 1996. These couples said that their relationships worked because they were committed to each other and they trusted one another. They felt love for each other, they had good communication skills, effective problem-solving skills, similar personal philosophies and values, they were attracted to each other sexually and they both had a good sense of humor and enthusiasm for life. The results of this survey demonstrate that fulfilling long-term relationships do exist and they offer a legitimate source of optimism for anyone who wants to participate in a life-enhancing relationship.

After considering what these and other couples have concluded about what is important in a positive relationship, you and your partner can discuss and clarify the nature of the relationship that the two of you want to create. Your mutually defined goals will provide purpose and direction for the personal and collective changes that are needed so the two of you can build the relationship that you both want. You can both learn to accept responsibility for the problematic factors that are exclusively yours and you can learn to accept assistance from one another as each of you addresses your personal issues. Finally, you can work together to make the personal and interactive changes that will result in your own unique and fulfilling relationship.

A healthy enriching relationship can be illustrated by the letter H. These H-type relationships consist of two emotionally healthy people who, if necessary, could successfully stand on their own but they choose instead to become a life-enhancing team. If you are currently in an H-type relationship, enjoy one another, enjoy your life together and don't look for problems where they don't exist.

There are also many relationships established by people who learned from their earlier experiences to be wary of emotional openness. These problematic relationships can be illustrated by the letter A. These A-type relationships consist of two people who have many positive and lovable attributes but their relationship history is such that they are equally uncomfortable in the state of unguarded openness that is fundamental for intimacy. Each tends to assume that their relationship difficulties are the fault of the other, but this is rarely the case. If you are drawn to A-type partners, it is highly probable that you are also an A-type partner. Fortunately, if you are an A-type, you don't have to remain that way. You can learn how to identify and alter your problematic relationship perceptions, reactions and behavior patterns. By effectively utilizing the creative imagery and the concepts and illustrations introduced in this paper, you will find that you will eventually become attracted to emotionally healthier people and you will be able to participate in H-type life-enhancing relationships. You may have to make relatively minor adjustments or, if your relationship history has been exceptionally unpleasant, you may have considerable but worthwhile work to do.

## **THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF YOUR NEW RELATIONSHIP**

Let me outline for you now the key building blocks from which the framework for, *If You Really Loved Me... You Could Read My Mind* is constructed. Real legitimate optimism is the point where we will begin. The optimism or pessimism that couples feel concerning the probable success of their relationships understandably arises from their personal experiences and their selective observations of other people's relationships. Good relationships provide life-enhancement through support, encouragement, sharing, laughter, sexual enjoyment, mutual confirmation and that general feeling of being lovingly connected with another person. Some relationships however, can become a setting for criticism, embarrassment, humiliation, rejection, loneliness and diminished self-worth. It is easy to see why experiences of this nature can contribute to a person's pessimism about future relationships. Fortunately, there are numerous valid reasons for optimism about life-enhancing relationships generally and for your capacity to become a full partner in such a relationship.

### **A Relationship Created By Choice**

When you were a child you had little or no choice about the nature and quality of your primary relationships. You lived in your family and were part of your family's dynamics because this was the family into which you were born. Later, when you were an inexperienced teenager with new interests and powerful feelings, you probably made some mistakes that you wouldn't make now. When you look back with the benefit of hindsight, you may recall some of your relationship choices and behaviors with varying degrees of embarrassment and regret. Your adult relationships have probably been influenced by these earlier experiences and by the subsequent conclusions that you formed about yourself, about how relationships seem to work and about what you can reasonably expect from relationships. Your assumptions may include some of the following: If your partner really loves you, he or she should know what you're thinking without the necessity of you expressing yourself...Real loving relationships develop

naturally and they shouldn't require work...If you have to work on a relationship it will lose its spontaneity and become a job...Don't rock the boat because, if you disagree about anything important it may result in the relationship ending...Don't expect too much because most relationships are okay at best, deteriorate with time and then become loveless arrangements of convenience... You make me miserable by constantly criticizing me so why don't you just accept me as I am and all will be well...Men are all X and women are all Y therefore their thinking and behavior is so predictable that careful listening is unnecessary.

Your relationships don't have to be governed by your history and your history-based assumptions. You can make changes! When you make the decision to define the type of relationship that you want, you are creating the equivalent of a light-house to keep you on course. With a self-defined sense of purpose and direction nothing is automatic or beyond your control. You don't have to simply hope for the best. You don't have to do things the way other couples do them nor do you have to follow cultural traditions. You and your partner are the ones who decide upon the nature and the specifics of your relationship. You can borrow what you wish from the research and from friends but ultimately, you and your partner can create the relationship that is best for the two of you.

### **Create Your Own Relationship Constitution**

As was mentioned earlier, couples in long-term fulfilling relationships give the following reasons for the success of their relationships: They are committed to their relationship and to their partner. They built a foundation of trust upon which they engage in open communication. Their communication includes respect for the unique perspectives of the other and therefore facilitates careful listening. They feel and express love for one another. They identify and solve problems from a team perspective. They share a similar spiritual philosophy and they share similar values. They find each other attractive and they express affection for each other. They enjoy sexual fulfillment together. They both have a good sense of humor and they have fun doing things that they both enjoy. They remain individuals while sharing a zest for life.

A relationship constitution is a statement, created by and agreed upon by both partners, that establishes the fundamental nature of their relationship. You may want to include some or all of the above characteristics in your constitution or you may want to create your own unique relationship statement. If you and your partner are just starting your relationship or if you're starting over, you may want your relationship constitution to include the *prime directive*...that nobody gets hurt! Love for another person comes from getting to know that person. Getting to know your partner occurs in an open intimate relationship within which you both learn to trust that when you openly express your thoughts and feelings, you will not be judged, criticized, ridiculed or humiliated. You both promise that neither of you will take advantage of the trust and vulnerability of the other even when you are anxious or angry. This is a promise that initially will be hard to keep but both partners must discipline themselves so that they can build the trust that is the foundation of all intimate relationships.

If you are starting over, a corollary to your *prime directive* should be that neither of you will reach back to the past and use an example of your partners former behavior to win an argument here in the present. You have agreed to devote your efforts to the creation of the relationship represented by your constitution and the aggressive use of examples from the time before you created your constitution is unfair and counter-productive. This promise to deal with situations as they occur rather than bringing up situations from your pre-constitution relationship can also be difficult to keep, but fulfilling this promise is also a key aspect of the trust that you and your partner are establishing with each other.

You and your partner will recognize that this is the primary relationship in your lives. Other people such as those in your families-of-origin, your extended families, your friends and your work colleagues are all valued and respected but they will not take precedence over your primary relationship. You are building something special, unique and life-enhancing so give it the preferential treatment it warrants. You will not exclude others but you will not allow others to harm or undermine your primary relationship.

### **Make A Commitment Or Say Farewell**

Your first commitment, upon which the second one rests, is your commitment to yourself. Ask yourself whether you are presently ready to make a commitment to a new or renewed relationship. Stay present with your thoughts and feelings about this important question. Identify what you actually think and feel rather than what you believe others expect of you. If your emotional and rational answer is no, stop now. If your answer is an understandably guarded and tentative yes...but still a yes, make a commitment to yourself and to your partner that you will work at creating the type of relationship that you both want. If you and your partner are ending your former problematic relationship and choosing to build a new one, set a time limit that is acceptable to both of you and then commit to work on the creation of your new relationship during that period of time. At the end of the two or three months, if that was the time limit that you set, separately and then with your partner, assess whether you have made sufficient progress toward your relationship light-house to continue. It is important to make this assessment carefully. Many people choose to prematurely give up on their relationship because the emotions are more taxing than they expected. Others continue to sustain hope beyond reason and stay in their relationship even though it has become detrimental. If you stay, do so because you can see measurable progress toward the goals that you and your partner established when you created your relationship constitution.

If children are part of your relationship equation, you will do well to avoid the common misconception that couples should stay together for the benefit of the children. Be as clear as you can be about what constitutes *benefit* for your children. Loveless efficiency does not provide a nurturing setting for children! Chronic overt or covert hostility does not provide a nurturing setting for children! Do you really want to be in a relationship that exists exclusively for the children? Your decision to stay or to leave obviously warrants your full and careful consideration. Be thorough. Make this decision in the manner that maximizes the probability that when you look back upon this decision in the future, you will know that it was the right decision.

## **The Importance Of Staying Present**

Many books have been published that offer helpful advice to couples who want to communicate more effectively. Most of the advice that you will find in these books is professionally sound and will be helpful, if you can stay present with your feelings as you communicate. Staying present is certainly not a new concept but it is essential for meaningful self-awareness and for emotional connections with others. Over the years the ability to stay present emotionally has been called: focusing, self-awareness, presence-of-mind and most recently, emotional intelligence. All of these terms refer to your capacity to think clearly while you simultaneously feel the emotions that are present in any situation.

You are staying present when you are open to your feelings without being becoming too anxious. You are staying present when you know that you could pull away from what you feel but instead you choose to experience your emotions, think clearly and make appropriate decisions. You are staying present when you can accurately assess and take responsibility for your part in an argument instead of blaming your partner, acting out in your own special way or creating a premature solution to end the conflict. You are staying present when you can laugh easily and with your whole being, when you can appreciate beauty, when you can experience wonder and when you can feel passion. You are staying present when you can listen to the words and the feelings expressed by your partner. Your ability to stay present with your feelings allows you to fully experience everything and subsequently, to contribute your half of the bridge that you and your partner will build as you create your letter H relationship.

As you know, staying present can be much easier to talk about than it is to achieve and it is often most difficult to achieve when it is most needed. However, if you are to identify and then express what you think and feel about important subjects in your relationship and, if you are to fully listen to the thoughts and feelings expressed by your partner, you will need to stay present with your emotions. Staying present often takes courage and discipline but the benefits are definitely worth the effort.

## **Unique Perspectives**

Each person has a unique perspective of him or her self and of the circumstances of his or her life. When couples accept that they each perceive everything uniquely, they are much more likely to listen to one another and they will be more likely to make sincere and concerted efforts to understand the reality their partner is experiencing. The acknowledgment of each other's unique perspective sets the stage for effective communication. Instead of repeatedly following a familiar but frustrating circular communication pattern that leads to disappointment, anger and feelings of helplessness, couples can learn to listen to one another, to gain understanding, to solve problems and, with practice, to communicate in a loving manner.

Authoritative, exclusively rational and even adversarial communication may be common in many professional settings but these forms of communication usually rest on the assumption of a single and correct perspective on the issue at hand. The purpose of this communication is to convince the other person, sometimes aggressively, of the correctness of the stated perspective. In personal relationships there are always two perspectives. Neither person has to accept the perspective of the other but listening to your partner's perspective is obviously necessary.

Couples sometimes forget about unique perspectives and they assume that they know, without the need to ask, what their partner is thinking. On other occasions they expect their partner to know what they are thinking and become upset when misunderstandings occur. The potential for problems is limitless when couples include mind reading in their repertoire of communication skills.

## **RELATIONSHIP IMAGERY ACTIVITIES**

Couples seek professional help because their best thinking has led them to their present unpleasant circumstances...They have become locked in a pattern of repetitive non-productive thinking that is communicated through blaming and hurtful criticism fueled by selective listening and mind reading. Therefore, when a couple chooses to build a new and better relationship, the initial task, after they have clarified the specific nature of their desired or ideal relationship, is to identify their chronically problematic communication patterns.

### **Level One Communication**

In the early stages of the counseling process the established communication dynamics of each couple usually functions on two interrelated levels of perceived reality, though the couple often has limited awareness of either level. The more obvious of these two levels is expressed through the unique language and style of communication that they have developed during the life-span of their relationship. Because they use their special style of communication everyday and because they developed it over their time together, it seems normal to them. This level of communication includes factors such as voice-tone, non-verbals and the recurring themes and phrases that are part of an overall pattern that repeatedly leads to disappointingly negative outcomes rather than to positive outcomes. The familiar tools of active listening, reflection, and summarizing that are part of empathic communication are effective when working with this level of communication. When the partners can stay present emotionally, when they can respect that they both have unique perspectives on everything, when they refrain from mind reading and from making assumptions and, when they build trust by adhering to their prime directive, they can listen to each other like never before. The accurate information that each gains about the perceptions of his or her partner invites understanding, more effective problem resolution, increased intimacy and reduces the occurrence of the misunderstandings that lead to seemingly non-resolvable conflicts.

## **Level Two Communication**

The second level of perceived reality is not as obvious as the first level because it originates from each partner's past experiences and usually operates out of their full awareness. This perceived reality is carried by each person's *relationship learners* and is based on the emotion-laden conclusions, self-assessments and reactive behavior patterns that they formed as a result of their experiences in and their observations of other relationships. A relationship learner is the person that you were when you experienced and/or observed as a child, as an adolescent or as a younger adult, a memorable relationship dynamic. For example, you may have concluded from earlier unpleasant experiences that, *the people closest to you hurt you the most*, or you may have grown up in a loving family where you learned that, *the people closest to you, love you, support you and enhance the quality of your life*. If your relationship learners are similar to the latter example, you are probably in letter H relationships with other emotionally healthy individuals. However, if your relationship learners are similar to the former example, you will repeatedly find yourself in relationships with people who also learned to fear intimacy while simultaneously longing for it.

You and your partner, without fully realizing when it is happening, may sometimes be reacting to your histories as well as to the situation here in the present. This amplification of emotion is called an *affect bridge* because the emotions that legitimately arise from the current situation bridge to earlier similar situations and activate the emotions from these earlier events thereby amplifying your current feelings. The present situation may warrant an emotional response of four on a scale of ten but the bridging effect generates a reaction of nine or ten on a scale of ten. If the emotion involved is anger, fear or feelings of rejection, the decisions you make in a state of amplified emotional arousal may lead to problems. Each of you can learn to use imagery to identify your problematic relationship learners so you both can decide how to make the appropriate positive changes at the level of your learners. Then together you can listen, reflect and be supportive of one other as each of you talks about your history, how it has been effecting you in this relationship and how you plan to respond therapeutically to your own learners. You can also decide how you can be helpful to one another in this very beneficial personal change process.

## **Imagery Tools**

Logic and rational thinking are obviously necessary for interpersonal communication and for gaining self-awareness but we are also creative, emotional and interpretive beings. Our rational capabilities are complemented by a mosaic of our unique emotion laden perceptions that are created and continuously altered by our subjective experiencing of life events.

Every young child, and we were all children at one time, discovers how to pretend spontaneously, creatively and with vividness. Imagery is pretending with a purpose. It is the primary tool in all realms of creative endeavor. Artists, architects, engineers, writers and performers of all types learn to surrender their intellectual control so they can experience the images and sensations of their work. This surrender of conscious control

also facilitates the imagery of self-awareness. Now, as an adult, you can call upon your long established capacity to pretend as you learn to use purposeful imagery activities that will help you make the changes that you need to make so you can be a full partner in a letter H relationship.

These relationship imagery activities can vary considerably but they all share a number of key concepts. The first concept is that of quiet concentration. With your partner or on your own, sitting or lying comfortably, you begin by letting your eyes close. Then, take some time to bring to mind thoughts and images that you know will initiate comfortable feelings in you. You may enjoy recalling in detail a favorite holiday setting or names and faces of childhood friends that you haven't thought of in years, or possibly you will enjoy a calming enjoyable imaginary setting.

The second concept involves accessing your relationship limiting perceptions. While maintaining the relaxing state that arises from your pleasant imagery, bring a personal goal to mind. Sometimes your goal may be to generally enhance your ability to be a full partner in a life-enhancing relationship and on another occasion your goal may be more specific. You may want to enhance your confidence in your attractiveness, to overcome shyness or your fear of rejection, to express yourself more clearly, to identify problematic influences from your background or you may have some other specific goal that you want to reach... While sustaining your comfort and with your goal in mind, you can experience imagery activities such as those that are introduced in the following paragraphs or, when you feel confident about these concepts, you can create your own imagery activities. These activities are designed to let you surrender intellectual control and allow into your awareness the relationship inhibiting learner that comes to mind on this occasion. Your learners will come to your mind in the form of memories of you, as you were at the time, when you experienced or observed something memorable concerning personal relationships. They will come one at a time or possibly you will engage two or three learners arising from the same relationship theme. Your task is to stay present, even though at first you may want to pull away, and focus your attention on the conclusions that you formulated from these events. You can't change your history but you can change the understandable but intimacy inhibiting consequences of your history.

By using imagery tools you will be able to clarify what lasting and influential conclusions you drew from your past relationship experiences and you will come to respect that your conclusions were subjective, creative and formulated in states of emotional arousal by the person you were at that time. You will subsequently appreciate why your relationship learners have had lasting influence in your life and why they are frequently reluctant to surrender their perspectives and their power to keep you from potential harm. You may long to be in a loving relationship but your longing won't be sufficient to convince a learner who concluded from earlier painful experiences that people can't be trusted, that you get hurt when you open up, or some similar intimacy quashing conclusion. Therefore this learner will do whatever it can to *keep you safe* and it does that by keeping you out of letter H relationships because those fulfilling and life-enhancing relationships require emotional openness by both of the partners.

This brings us to the third concept common to this type of relationship imagery. The opportunity now exists for both partners to change the consequences of their history and subsequently to participate in a life-enhancing relationship. Each person's situation will be different and the specifics of the change process will vary according to the circumstances, but the goal is consistent for both partners. You can become the one who decides about when, with whom and under what circumstances you will be open and spontaneous. Rather than remaining emotionally distant because you learned to fear intimacy, you can now begin to legitimately convince your learners to trust your judgment and to let you make relationship decisions. You will find that you will have to earn the trust of your learners. You will have to demonstrate, with growing consistency over time, that you will become self-aware by staying present emotionally and responding to internal and external cues as they occur. You will also have to demonstrate that you value yourself enough to take care of yourself physically, emotionally and within your personal and professional relationships. If you can learn to do these things, your learners will begin to give you the power to decide who to trust and who to engage for letter H relationships and how to function in these trust based unguarded relationships. This is not an easy process but it is less difficult when couples talk to one another about their learner-governed vulnerabilities and offer support to one another during the change process. When they do this they experience a very special form of empathy that sets the stage for their level one communication.

The following are summaries of a sample of relationship imagery activities that show how couples and individuals can use these tools to enhance their self-awareness, to make personal changes at the level of their learners and to dramatically improve the quality of their relationship.

### **The Ring**

In your favorite chair or on your bed or sofa, close your eyes and take some time to relax. Then, imagine that your goal is to become a full and participating partner in a satisfying and life-enhancing relationship. Then, beginning where you are now, imagine yourself walking down a road toward the goal that you have created in your mind...Up ahead of you a little ways you will see a ring that is about 15 feet in diameter. The bottom portion of this ring is buried in the road...that's what holds it up. If you are to go from where you are now to your goal, you will have to pass through this ring. As you approach the ring you will notice that across the mouth of the ring there is a special filter through which you are about pass...remember, let yourself pretend. If you are carrying any beliefs, conclusions or perceptions that could inhibit or block your progress toward your goal, they will be filtered out of you, in the form of a powder, as you pass through the ring...Go through the ring now...Look back...If you see some powder on the ground, go back around the ring, scoop up the powder and take it to the processor that is sitting by the side of the road...Put the powder in the hopper of the processor and turn on the switch...The processor will convert your powder into a form that is personally meaningful to you...Watch what important memory, person, event or image comes out of the processor...Remember to ask yourself what conclusion you originally drew from this experience that you have just recalled with the help of the processor. This conclusion

feels like fact to the learner who originally formed the conclusion...Now you can begin to work with this learner to negotiate the shift of decision-making power from this learner to you.

This type of simple imagery suspends your intellectual control and allows you to utilize your creative abilities. Those who are deeply anchored in rational thinking may consider this type of activity frivolous and disconcerting. If, however, their desire to be in a loving relationship is strong, they will persist until they discover how valuable this type of activity can be. If a couple participates in this activity simultaneously they can then talk about what came to mind for each of them after the powder was processed. Sometimes that which comes out of the processor will be really clear and sometimes it will be less clear. The partners can discuss whether the situations that came to mind have played a negative role in their relationship and, if so, how they can help each other resolve what needs to be resolved so they can minimize or remove their impediments.

### **The Boat**

Another imagery tool that couples find effective is that of an imagined boat on an imagined river. Again, you relax, bring to mind your goal and then use this imagery to check internally for impediments to your relationship success. The river serves the same function as the processor in the previous example. It lets you suspend your tendency to intellectualize. You can imagine that you are standing on the shore looking at a thick fog bank that has formed on the river to your left. The current carries a boat out of the fog and brings it gently onto the riverbank right in front of you. What is in the boat? What meaning does it have for you? What did you conclude from the situation represented by that which you found in the boat?

In a second version of this imagery activity you imagine that you get in the boat and the current, which you imagine represents time, carries you down stream to a sample of relationship experiences that have influenced your perceptions of relationships in a negative manner. When you go ashore on three or four occasions, remember these situations with the intent of identifying the fulfillment inhibiting conclusions that you drew at the time. The events can't be changed but the conclusions can be.

### **The Building**

Each partner can relax, imagine a relationship goal and again, check for internal learners that could interfere with the attainment of that goal. This time each of them can imagine themselves represented by a building of about six to eight floors. Each floor represents a key aspect of their sense of self. For example, one floor may represent personal confidence, another might represent health choices, another may be about professional or business performance and another is about relationships. You imagine entering the building on the ground floor and going over to the elevator. On the elevator you can push the button for the relationship floor, or, if something else needs your attention before you go to the relationship floor you can imagine pushing the appropriate button. Imagine the elevator taking you to the appropriate floor. When you get off the elevator you will be

standing in a long hallway with many doors on either side...Go to the door that has a light on above it...Pause before going through this door...Imagine that when you step through this door you will step into a time and place where you learned something about relationships that still interferes with your ability to participate in a fulfilling relationship.

Couples can devise their own imagery activities as long as their activities include a device for surrender of intellectual control and a means of discovery. Some couples have responded well to an image of a cart pulled by an animal of their choice. The animal knows where each of them needs to go and pulls the cart through time to personally meaningful relationship situations.

One couple responded to an image of the two of them, getting on a raft on their wedding day. They had let the river carry them for many conflicted years. Neither one seemed able to contribute to improving their relationship yet neither one would leave the raft. It became evident in counseling that they both lacked self-confidence. They agreed that they hadn't wanted to rock the boat in any way because they both felt unable to swim. This imagery activity helped to break the cycle of creative bitterness that they had refined over the years. The focus of the counseling shifted from their relationship dynamics to their individual self-worth issues. This shift helped them make an important relationship decision from a position of greater self-confidence. They decided that when they were young they had stepped onto their raft for dependency reasons but now they felt ready to go their separate ways. They made the decision to separate.

Another simple but effective use of imagery can be illustrated with this brief example. A couple who had been married for many years repeatedly quarreled about what she described as his insensitivity and her sensitivity. The following imagery helped them to begin resolving this chronic issue. The author suggested the following. "If your husband touches you on the knee, you will feel X...If he touches you on the knee but you have an unhealed burn there, he needs to take responsibility for the intensity and nature of his touch and you need to take responsibility for healing your burn." This simple tool helped them to stop blaming one another and turn their attention to resolving this situation.

Couples are often pleased to find that these imagery activities not only help them clarify their individual perspectives and conclusions about relationships, they also help the couple recognize how their individual perspectives frequently amplify the misunderstanding, conflict and distancing that exists in their relationship. This awareness lets them devise here and now strategies to defuse the interaction of their learners.

One couple discovered, after using the ring imagery, that he had learned to be secretive in his emotionally explosive family. He also recalled saying to himself as a youngster that he would never marry an angry woman like his mother. His girlfriend recalled feelings of abandonment in her family and expressed a vulnerability to rejection. They realized that his learned secrecy sometimes felt like abandonment to her. When she felt that he was pulling away she would feel hurt and then become angry. Her anger caused him to pull further away and question whether he wanted to marry a woman like her. If they had relied exclusively on level one communication to discuss their relationship difficulties

they might have decided not to be a couple. Even though level one communication is essential in healthy relationships, this couple could have made a decision about whether they should get married at the level of their long-standing, out-of-conscious-awareness relationship learners. They could have moved on and repeated these themes in other relationships while remaining vulnerable to the influences of their unidentified relationship learners. Fortunately, they responded effectively to their personal learners. They were supportive of each other and during the period when they were working with their own issues they devised some verbal signals that they used to prevent unintentional activation of their anxieties. They chose to stay together.

*If You Really Loved Me... You Could Read my Mind* also offers a second type of imagery activity that couples can use to plan and rehearse aspects of their new relationship. They can rehearse, in imagery, the specifics of their agreed upon improved communication style, better problem-solving strategies, activities for personal values clarification, goal setting activities and more enjoyable ways to play. These creative tools also require the couple to stay present but they also provide a comfortable way for them to become accustomed to staying present emotionally and thereby become more able to enjoy their feelings and enjoy each other.

## **BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP THAT YOU WANT**

Many people learned, as children, in their education programs, in their careers, in competitive sports and in other situations, to rely heavily on their rational abilities. Rational thinking is obviously essential for success in life but in the realm of personal relationships the exclusive use of rational thinking becomes part of the problem. Lawyers, physicians, academics and other professionals who are accustomed to being in control and who need to be focused, efficient and solutions oriented in their career, sometimes struggle with the more subjective dynamics of personal relationships. Anyone who distances from their emotions, whether for professional reasons or personal reasons, can benefit from enhancing their emotional awareness. Couples can learn to balance their admirable rational skills with a greater capacity to stay present emotionally, to respect with empathy the principle of unique perspectives, to listen effectively and to self-express accurately. They can also develop the skills that will allow them to use creative imagery activities so they can enjoy greater intimacy and benefit from level one and level two communication skills.

We do not have to be governed by the negative influences of our past. We do not have to be passive or resigned about our relationships but sometimes it takes focused work to build the relationship you want. When we accept that we can't just put our past behind us and expect to be able to stay present emotionally and when we are willing to identify and resolve influences from our relationship history, we can lay the foundation upon which we can build our own fulfilling life-enhancing relationships.

A young woman was talking to me recently about her troubled relationship with her boyfriend. She said, *If we originally got together for the wrong reasons, can we ever be together for the right reasons?* Hopefully you can see from the concepts and tools outlined in this paper that the answer is an enthusiastic, yes!

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