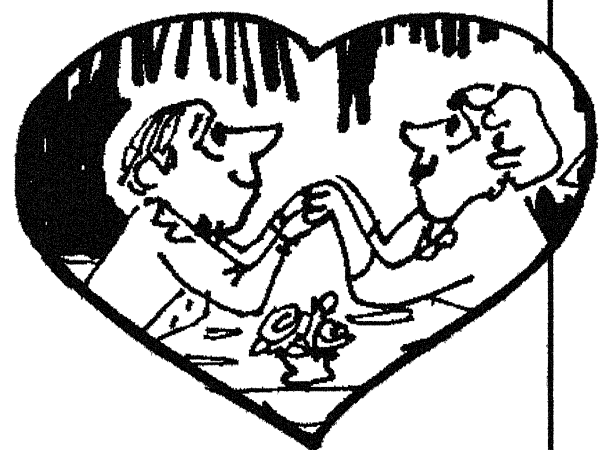


Choice, Not Chance:

Enhancing your Marital Relationship



Story writers often say that only young people are in love, and the excitement and glamour of romance end at the altar. How blind they are. The best romance is inside marriage; the finest love stories come after the wedding, not before.

— Irving Stone

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Enhancing your Marital Relationship

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I. An Introduction to Enhancing your Marital Relationship

Most married couples care about the quality of their marital relationship. *Enhancing marital relationships, improving couple communication, and strengthening families* emerged as

critical concerns in recent surveys conducted by Ohio State's Extension Home Economics faculty. People identifying these as concerns want to strengthen their marriages, join with their



spouses in a process of continual personal growth, and, ultimately, create a better family life.

Choice, Not Chance: Enhancing Your Marital Relationship will help participants strengthen their marriages. The goal of marriage enrichment is to develop, through a process of growth and behavior change, the potential for mutually satisfying and creative relationships. The purposes of this program are to: 1. Increase each participant's understanding of the marital relationship and factors that affect it. 2. Provide a structure and direction that will help spouses work together to enhance and strengthen their marriages, and, ultimately, strengthen their families.

The intent is to draw from inside the marriage what is already there. Couples form a stronger relationship when spouses develop a realistic appreciation of their partners as persons and value each other's contributions to the marriage.

Enriching and strengthening a marriage involves learning to share at deeper levels. The idea is to become more intimate through mutual self-disclosure and acceptance. The process is risky and takes time. Spouses must learn to reveal more of themselves and to accept what their partners are revealing. Couples should agree together to become involved in a daily marriage enrichment experience by spending time communicating with each other. A commitment on the part of each of you to try a structured program together may keep you going when you get busy or feel a little afraid and want to quit.

About the Program

There are several things that are being assumed in this enrichment program. These assumptions are:

- Marriage is a dynamic process, not static. Given the proper conditions for growth, most couples can move toward their relationship potential.
- At different phases of married life, couples need new skills while old ones need to be continually sharpened.
- The marriage relationship is central to any attempt to strengthen families. If the mari-

tal system is functioning well and is satisfying to both partners, the family system will function better.

- Planning — selecting goals, making decisions, developing strategies, coping with consequences, and so forth — is a part of marriage and life.

Helpful Hints

The following are some helpful hints to assist you in sharing together each day. Review these periodically to help keep you on track.

- Set aside a certain time each day to share with each other — a time that is relatively free of distraction. Make it prime time, not leftover time.
- Share only positive thoughts, feelings, and wants during this sharing time. This is not a time to complain or debate.
- Emphasize the sharing of feelings (joy, appreciation, pleasure). This is not an exercise in reasoning or evaluation and judgment. Avoid evaluating and analyzing your partner's feelings. Work on accepting them.
- Speak for yourself. Say "I feel...;" "I want...;" "I think...;" "I like..." Don't say "you..." or "people..."
- Use language that expresses appreciation ("I appreciate it when you..."). Provide positive feedback and avoid criticism.
- Learn to listen. Try to understand what your partner is saying — what she/he means. Put your understanding of what you heard in your own words (without changing the meaning) and say it back to the speaker to see if you accurately received the message sent. Remember, when in doubt, check it out.
- Have a time-out rule. Whenever either partner feels that she/he does not want to continue the discussion, she/he may say time-out. You each agree to take a break or change the subject without asking why the other does not wish to continue. Knowing that this option is available will keep you from feeling trapped. You are more likely to share if you can decide when and how quickly to share. Focus on the present. If you need to say something about the past or future, give your present feelings about it.

- Take it one step at a time. Otherwise, you will set yourself up for failure.

Words of Caution

Not everyone will want to participate in a marriage enrichment program. For example, your spouse may be mildly reluctant or extremely resistant to participating in this type of activity. If that is the case, please read the section on “Reluctant partners: A note to those whose partners choose not to participate” before starting the program. (Appendix A)

Also, note that marriage enrichment is not the same as marriage counseling. It is the process of making a good marriage better. If you find your marriage in trouble, you should seek marital counseling or therapy to get the foundation of your marriage restored. (Appendix B)

Marriage is not an answer, but a search. It is a relationship that generates change by relating and living together. It can produce growth, identity and a sense of rootedness. You will need to renew and enrich your relationship, again and again, to avoid it becoming a trap and to defy the high divorce rate.

The Starting Point

To get started: 1. Review the purposes and assumptions of this program. It is a good idea to review these from time-to-time as you move through the program together.

2. Set aside a certain time each day for at least two weeks to engage in the marriage enrichment program. If it is not possible to do it daily, try to set aside at least two or three times (one-half hour to two hours each) a week to share with one another. Plan to complete the program in no more than six to eight weeks. There are 12 activities and a section on “Realizing Your Marriage Potential.”

3. Get a notebook or note pad for each spouse. Several activities involve writing your thoughts and feelings or writing messages for your spouse.

Now it is time to get started. Follow the instructions in this booklet. It will be best not to skip the readings. They will enable you to gain more from the recommended activities.

Remember — it is your marriage and this is your program. Move in a manner and at a pace that is comfortable for both of you.

Good luck as you embark on this adventure.

II. The Marriage Relationship

After a couple has been married for a number of years, there seems to be a lack of individual creativity in the relationship. Each person becomes involved in a routine of relating to the other in a certain way. Patterns develop because of living in the same house and responding to children's needs. Couples develop

certain habitual work patterns, see the same people socially, and develop ways of relating and behaving that may persist, unchallenged and unchanged, for years. The behavior will continue long after it has ceased to produce delight, zest or growth. Then, one factor often destructive to marriage sets in — BOREDOM.



Marriages have to change to survive. Spouses have to adapt considerably over time. They must adapt to changes in each other, the family, and society. This is how a marriage survives.

In principle, each couple has the possibility of recreating their marriage at every moment of their life. The couple is like a sculptor in the construction and shaping of their marriage.

Given the limitations of imagination, courage and skills, the sculptor has many degrees of freedom to create the form of the marriage. The sculptor confronts a heap of clay, imagines a pleasing form, and sets about creating that art form. The sculptor may create several forms before creating one that will work.

The couple can likewise recreate, reframe, or renew their marital relationship, but it can be a difficult venture. The sculpting is more challenging in marriage because there are two persons with two different perceptions of the relationship. There are two sets of needs to be considered and two sets of expectations that are involved. It is possible for two people of good will to discuss their future possibilities together, and to reconcile differences that arise. It is also possible for a couple to realize a greater amount of their marriage potential. What seems to thwart this kind of interpersonal creativity is 1) failure in imagination on the part of either partner; 2) fear of external criticism and actions; 3) fear of change in oneself or in one's partner; and 4) the fear of conflict between the two partners.

We make fantastic demands on our marriages today. When a man and a woman join in this mutual adventure through life, both individuals and the marriage face fierce strains; yet, in most cases, spouses give marriage only leftover time.

When we wake up in the morning and are fresh, we go immediately to work — in the fields, at a job, or at home. We make our way home at the end of the day exhausted with every bit of usefulness wrung out of us. There, late in the evening at the low point of our energy, we pick up with our marriages. Then we “ask” our marriages to recharge us enough so that the next morning we can again return to the work-world at our best.

In this kind of society, most of us take from our marriages and very few of us feed them. So the high divorce rate today shouldn't surprise us — marriages die of malnutrition. Yet, modern men and women who are intelligent, articulate, efficient and successful in work obviously can do better in the most personal of all relationships — marriage. Marriage ought to foster the growth of authentic love between man and woman. This love should evolve as a mixture of greater humanness between the partners (also called friendship) and a meaningful sexual relationship, based on respect, trust and compassion. This deep and meaningful love is devoted to the welfare of each other.

Marital love means caring for another person rather than taking care of or taking from another person. Mutual understanding and consideration nourish the marriage. If caring, understanding and consideration are evident in the marriage, it becomes possible for the marriage to endure and be a source of support, even when the couple feels low or the energy drain is high.

Components of a Satisfying Marriage

Marriage is a fluid, flexible interaction process. It is a process of ongoing growth, adaptation and change that never ends. Yet, some components are necessary for a couple to maintain the marriage. These components help to keep the marriage in working order, in good times and bad times. These include:

1. **Trust.** Trust is usually built on mutual respect and acceptance of differentness. Developing a sense of trust means that both persons will do what they say they will do, and will not do and say things that violate the integrity of the relationship.
2. **Commitment.** This is critical to a strong marriage. When commitment is taken for granted, vitality can disappear from the relationship. For example, if a spouse thinks the marriage vow commitment “so long as we both shall live” is enough to keep the marriage intact and uses it as an excuse to quit working at the marital relationship, the marriage will not live as long as the indi-

viduals. Once a couple commits themselves to the adventure of married life and to ongoing growth in their relationship, these commitments will help them walk in the valleys and face crises as well as climb to the mountain tops together.

3. **Skills.** Marriage as a lifetime process demands that both partners be skillful at understanding others, expressing needs, listening to each other, making decisions, negotiating and managing conflict, and having meaningful communication. Also, someone needs to know how to earn a living, how to cook, how to care for the house, and how to parent.
4. **Caring.** Nurturant love exists when meeting the needs of your partner is just as important as having your own needs met. Caring means being supportive of each individual's growth and personal interests as well as caring for the relationship.
5. **Reciprocity.** Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This means exchanging positive rewards and strokes with each other. It means avoiding those experiences that may hurt your partner and have an extremely detrimental effect on your relationship. It involves meshing of the various roles in the relationship (for example, spouse, friend, lover) and helping one another as each fulfills these roles.
6. **Effort.** All the trust, commitment, skills, and caring are not very productive without effort. Effort means taking time to work on your marriage. It means being willing to work together to develop a mutually satisfying relationship. It means participating in marital growth experiences to expand and enhance the relationship.

Stages of a Marriage

You and your partner will have several "marriages" over your lifetime together. This means your marriage will go through various stages. Each new stage will have its own rewards, but it will also call for adjustments in the relationship.

The stages of your marriage may be similar to the following:

1. **The Courtship Stage.** The process of successfully building and enriching a marital relationship begins at the mate selection stage. This is the stage where two people choose to become a couple and should begin to establish effective communication styles with one another.
2. **The Honeymoon Stage.** The newly married couple must make mutual adjustments and realign friendships and family relationships to include the spouse. Each must learn to live with a marriage partner.
Couples who never have children will stay longer at this stage and eventually move into the retirement stage. However, other factors, particularly jobs or careers, can have similar effects on childless couples as children do on other couples. Childless couples may focus more attention on work than on the marital relationship. At midlife (or even earlier), the spouses may realize they no longer have a relationship because other things took priority.
3. **Families With Young Children.** With the birth of the first child, the spouses become parents. They must make adjustments to children, and again realign friend and family relationships to include children.
This can be a very stressful stage. Researchers have found that marital satisfaction tends to decline with the birth of the first child and generally does not begin to increase until the last child leaves home. Couples who negotiate this stage well have good communication patterns and do not turn their lives over to their children exclusively. They recognize that a relationship cannot be postponed without damaging it.
4. **Families with Adolescents.** At this stage, the couple is attempting to balance family life with teenage children who are striving for independence. Effective skills in communication, decision making, negotiation and compromise are critical at this stage.
This may also be the stage where the marital pair begins to come to terms with the mistakes and realities of their lives. Career and midlife issues may need to be addressed.
5. **Launching Children.** Young adults begin bouncing in and out of the "nest." This can

be a trying time for couples because it is so transitory. It is particularly stressful for parents who are unwilling to let their children go, and who have identified themselves primarily as a parent and not as a spouse.

The couple must establish adult relationships with offspring, realign relationships to include in-laws and grandchildren, and, perhaps, cope with the disability and death of parents and grandparents. At this stage, the couple also must begin to renegotiate and revitalize the marriage relationship, relating to one another as persons, not parents.

6. **The Empty-Nest Stage.** This plus the next two stages of marriage now represent the longest phase of the family life cycle for many couples. They will have a longer time together after the children leave home than they did in all the earlier stages; therefore, preparation for these stages is critical.

At stage 6, the children are gone and marriage, not parenthood, is again the primary relationship. "Empty-nest shock" — the point when the couple realizes they no longer have a relationship to share without their children around — may strike couples who have always put the children's needs before their own needs and couple activities. Symptoms include dissimilar interests and nothing to talk about.

Couples who have prepared for a life alone again welcome this stage and tend not to experience negative effects of an "empty-nest." They have nurtured mutual interests, devoted "prime time" to the relationship, and maintained strong links with family

and friends. They enjoy the extra time they can now devote to each other.

7. **Retirement.** Substitutes for job and career must be found. A common complaint of couples at this stage in life is that they have too much "together time." This may be particularly true for couples who have neglected the marital relationship in earlier stages, or have failed to develop some separate interests. For couples who have maintained a focus on the marital relationship and developed mutually satisfying activities, they welcome the time they can now spend together.
8. **Old Age.** The basic unit of family life for many people at this stage is the marital relationship. The rewards for the couple at this stage are largely dependent on the earlier stages. If the earlier stages are viewed positively, there is a great sense of contentment. The chief tasks of the couple here are to cope with declining health, multiple losses and their own deaths.

Summary

Marriage is a process. The individuals in a relationship, as well as the marital relationship itself, go through stages and have the potential for continuous growth. Yet, this growth requires trust, commitment, skills, caring, reciprocity, and effort. Strong, healthy marriages do not just happen by chance. Rather, the spouses in such marriages have chosen to make the effort to make them strong, healthy and satisfying. Are you willing to spend the time and energy necessary to make your marriage better? If so, get started!

Happily Married People

All good marriages are not alike. However, researchers have found that certain characteristics more likely occur among husbands and wives in vital (happy) marriages than among less contented couples. These characteristics that form a profile of happily married people include:

1. People in vital marriages are giving people. They meet their emotional needs by doing for others — and they do not keep score.
2. They have a strong sense of commitment to their marriages. They do not take their happiness for granted, but are determined to make their marriages work.
3. They are strong-minded. They do not lose themselves in the relationship. They value their independence — the right to form their own opinions, make their own decisions, pursue their own goals — but marital harmony is a top priority.
4. They have vigorous sexual drives. Sex plays a central and profoundly important role in the marriage.
5. They like to talk. Happily married people spend much time sharing thoughts about all sorts of subjects. They are open and direct, not manipulative.
6. They have a positive outlook on life. Faith that things will get better helps them cope with crises.
7. They don't take the good things for granted. They express appreciation and are generous with praise.
8. They are deeply spiritual. They have strong spiritual or religious convictions and commit themselves to a spiritual lifestyle, though they may not be affiliated with an organized church.
9. They are sensitive to other people. They recognize the needs of others, respect their differences, consider their feelings, and put themselves in the other person's shoes.
10. They are willing to grow and change and to work hard at their marriages. They know that a good relationship requires flexibility and effort to keep it alive.

III. Daily Activities to Enhance your Marital Relationship

Day 1

The Triple Commitment

Commitment is a necessary component in a strong, healthy marriage. But we must ask: Commitment to what? To whom?

The primary commitment is to the growth of self, the growth of one's spouse, and the growth of the relationship. This triple commitment to growth enables couples to deal more effectively with a number of issues including trust and fidelity, role definition, and division of labor. The triple commitment is the most important element within the marriage.

Growth of Self

It is important for each of us as individuals to nurture ourselves, to expand our horizons toward new possibilities and toward developing ourselves to our fullest potential. If we fail to do this, and fail to hold ourselves in high positive regard, we become boring, unenlightened, closed, dull, and monotonous. If we fail to take care of ourselves, it also is hard to be able to give to others.

On the other hand, if we hold ourselves as being of high value with positive levels of self-esteem, self-regard and self-acceptance, we become enlightened, open, interesting, curious, dynamic and alive. Which kind of person would you prefer having breakfast with for the rest of your life? We often lack the time and energy for privacy and self-renewal. This is particularly true for people confronted with multiple roles and responsibilities: Husband, father, son; wife, mother, daughter; employee; homemaker; volunteer; and so forth. Yet each person needs to take time on a regular basis to engage in an activity that is esteem-building and energy-restoring.

If we neglect the self, or "blot out" the self in regard for the other, we bring decay and de-

In marriage, being the right person is as important as finding the right person. — Wilbert Donald Gough

struction to ourselves, our spouses and our relationships. Self-nurturance (growth and well-being) enhances one's ability in spouse-nurturance. Spouse-nurturance enhances the relationship. The relationship, in turn, provides a base of support for each person's personal growth and well-being.

Growth of Spouse

Resolve that, "It is in my best interest to be concerned for and committed to the well-being of my spouse." The greater your genuine concern and commitment for your spouse, the more likely your spouse will respond in kind. Likewise, if your partner begins from the position that it is in his or her best interest to be concerned for and committed to your well-being, the more likely you will respond in kind.

Remember that happily married people are giving people and sensitive to the needs of others.



Growth of the Relationship

It is necessary to put effort into a marriage. Strong marriages do not just happen. Spouses must exert energy (that is, work) to create and maintain a healthy, satisfying marital relationship.

Both spouses must put forth effort to achieve a balance in their relationship: A bal-

ance between freedom and security; independence and dependence; separateness and togetherness; and distance and closeness.

Achieving a balance demands good communication skills, the straightforward handling of conflict, and the negotiation and renegotiation of expectations.

Conclusion

There are three parts to a couple — me, you and us. Each is significant, has a life of its own, and makes the other more possible.

All couples have difficulties — pain, disappointment and misunderstandings — at

various times. However, if each spouse is committed to the growth of self, the growth of the marriage partner and the growth of the relationship, the marriage can survive the difficult times.

Activity #1: Working on the Triple Commitment

Do Part A alone and Part B with your spouse

A. Think about the things that contribute to your feelings of high positive self-esteem, self-regard and self-acceptance. First, write down things other people do that make you feel good about yourself: Compliment you on the way you look, praise your work, express appreciation for who you are, etc. Be specific. Next make a list of things you do for yourself that are esteem-building and energy-restoring. This may include things like visiting with a special friend, taking a hot bath, going for a walk, reading a good book, exercising, or having a “date” with your spouse. Again, be specific.

Review your two lists. Try to go back now and feel again the feelings you have when your self-esteem is high, your spirits are up. (Examples of feelings include on-top-of-the-world, blissful, enthusiastic, energized, and peaceful). Jot down some of these feelings.

B. When both of you have done Part A, share your lists with one another. One of you should share first while the other spouse listens. Then switch roles. Pay careful attention to what your spouse is sharing with you. What things can you do to contribute to his/her self-esteem? What things can you do to make it possible for your spouse to engage in activities he/she finds esteem-building and energy-restoring? (For example, give him/her 30 minutes to regroup at the end of the work day before talking about what happened during your day.)

Plan to do at least one of these things for each other in the next day or two. Work to incorporate esteem-building behaviors and activities — for you and your spouse — into your daily life.

Day 2

Learning to Listen

Communication is the lifeblood of every relationship. Therefore, one of the best ways for spouses to enrich their marital relationship is to improve the communication between them.

Effective communication helps to prevent loneliness, family problems, psychological stress, physical illness, and even death. Communication involves listening and talking (expressing oneself). Today, the focus is on listen-



Effective communication is behavior that transmits a meaning (message) from one person (sender) to another (receiver) so that both parties understand the same message. A shared understanding is critical to effective communication.

ing. Next time, we will focus on expressing yourself.

Listening is more than hearing. Hearing is a process by which auditory sensations are received and transmitted to the brain. Listening is a complex procedure involving interpreting and understanding what is heard.

Active listening is one of the best ways to express interest in and care for another person and his/her thoughts and feelings. It facilitates the expression of the most important matters on the person's mind and feelings surrounding those matters.

In active listening, the listener tries to understand what the speaker is saying. Then the listener puts his/her understanding of what the speaker said into his/her own words and says it back to the speaker to see if he/she got it right. This is paraphrasing. The listener does not attempt to change or add to the meaning of the message. The focus is on the content of the speaker's message — the listener sends no message of his own at this point.

If the listener has not understood what the speaker meant, the speaker can explain further. The listener again reflects back or paraphrases what the speaker said. Repeat this process until the message sent is the one received. When these two messages agree, reverse roles: The speaker becomes the listener and the listener becomes the speaker.

Examples

#1 Hearing without Listening

Husband: "I sure am tired tonight."

Wife: "You can rest tomorrow since it's Saturday."

Husband: "It would be nice to rest tonight."

Wife: "After we get home from the movie you can rest."

This wife was not listening to what her husband was saying. She was not trying to understand what her husband really meant.

#2 Active Listening

Husband: "I sure am tired tonight."

Wife: "Sounds like you would rather stay home than go out tonight."

Husband: "Yes, that's right. Do you mind?"

Wife: "No. That's fine with me."

This wife wisely checked the message to make sure she understood what her husband really was saying before she responded to it.

Communication like this enriches a marriage. Both understand each other and feel that what they say is being understood, that is, the message being sent is the message being received.

Now it's time for you to practice active listening.

Activity #2: Listening

1. Sit facing each other and maintain effective eye contact with each other. Effective eye contact is looking at another person when conversing with him or her. You may shift your focus or blink occasionally, but the majority of the time you are looking directly at the other person. However, you are not staring or glaring.

Effective eye contact conveys concern and interest while helping to maintain the attention of the other person and build trust in the relationship.

2. Decide who will be the speaker and who will be the listener.
3. The speaker sends a message, something important about the marital relationship that she or he wishes to share with the spouse. Focus on the positive aspects of your relationship the first time you do this exercise. For example, you might want to discuss what you value the most about the marriage or some quality your spouse contributes to the relationship to make it what it is.
4. In his/her own words, the listener feeds back only what she/he hears the speaker say. Focus on the content of the message.
5. The speaker confirms the listener's response by saying something like "yes, that's what I meant," or "let me clarify one point..." (Repeat steps 3 and 4 until the message sent is the message received).
6. Reverse roles and repeat the process.

An effective paraphrase:

- is concise
- reflects only the essentials of the speaker's message
- focuses on the content of the speaker's message
- is stated in the listener's own words

Day 3

Expressing Your Feelings

Self-disclosure occurs when you are your real self in the presence of others. It is feeling-talk — the direct expression of your feelings through words and body language. Yet, this kind of emotional directness between people is rare and difficult. The lack of self-disclosure (expressed feelings) in a marriage reduces or prevents the experience of love and real intimacy.

Most of the time when we want to let someone know how we feel (or want someone to do something), we send a “you” message. “You make me angry,” “Why don’t you ever talk to me?” and “You hurt me” are examples of “you” messages. “You” messages are usually put-downs and feel blaming. All the responsibility for past and future behavior is put on the other person.

Put-downs invite other put-downs. For example:

Wife: “Why don’t you ever stay home?”

Husband: “Why don’t you ever leave me alone?”

When “you” is the beginning of a negative statement, it is generally perceived as being an accusation or an attack. When we feel blamed, accused or attacked we will usually do two things: Defend ourselves and then counterattack. Therefore, if the content of a statement is negative, it is particularly important to avoid beginning it with “you.”

We need to learn to use “I” statements when expressing feelings, attempting to get someone to do something, etc. With “I” messages, you acknowledge your feelings, own them, and take responsibility for them. “I am angry.” “I am disappointed.” “I feel good about that.” There is no put-down. Arguments are avoided and issues can be dealt with more calmly. For example:

Wife: “I feel lonely because I am home alone so much. I need someone to talk to.”

Husband: “I don’t want you to be lonely. Maybe I can stay home more often and we can spend more time together.”

*Feelings are
neither right nor
wrong — they
simply are.*

Good “I” messages contain three elements: A feeling, a situation or behavior, and a need or a consequence. In the above example, the feeling was loneliness, the situation was being home alone, and the need was to have someone with whom to talk.

Another example of an “I” message is:

Husband: “I feel ignored when you spend so much time reading after the children are in bed. I need some time with you without the kids around.”

Wife: “I thought you liked to watch television at that time and didn’t want me bothering you with conversation. I will be happy to spend that time with you rather than reading.”

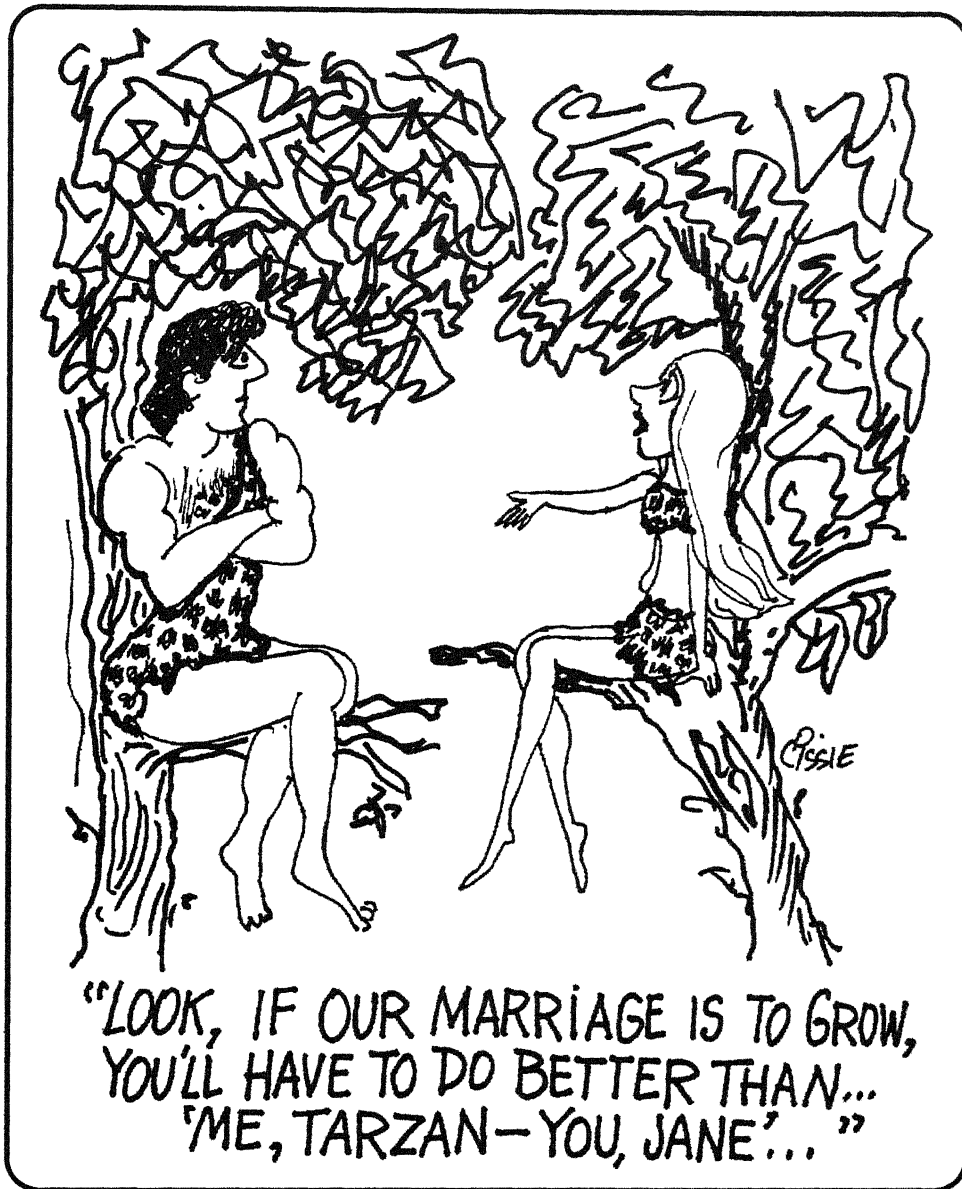
A good model for sending “I” messages is: I feel _____ when (or if) _____ because I need _____. Examples are:

1. “I feel all warm inside when you hug me because I need to be reminded of your love.” (example of a feeling, a behavior and a need).
2. “I get angry when you fail to let me know until the last minute that you have a dinner meeting because I have already prepared a meal.” (example of a feeling, a behavior and a consequence).

Of course, “I” messages are useful for effective complaining as in example #2. You are encouraged to use them for such purposes.

However, during your marital enrichment time, you are to use them only for sharing positive feelings as in example #1.

Now practice some “I” messages.



Activity #3: Expressing Your Feelings

NOTE: Be sure to focus on feelings, not thoughts. You may want to read the section on "Differentiating Feelings and Thoughts" (page 18) before doing this activity.

1. Pick a "warm" feeling you have toward your spouse.
2. Put it into the model for "I" messages: I feel _____ when (or if) _____ because I need _____.
3. Take turns sharing these feelings.
4. While your partner is sharing warm feelings with you, practice active listening.

Differentiating Feelings and Thoughts¹

If you can substitute the words “I think” for the words “I feel” in a sentence and it still makes grammatical sense, then probably you have expressed a thought, not a feeling.

1. I feel that spectator sports are not as rewarding as participant sports.
2. I think that spectator sports are not as rewarding as participant sports.

The sentence makes grammatical sense either way. Hence, it is a thought, not a genuine feeling.

Try these:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. I feel angry as the devil. | 1. I feel warm and cuddly. |
| 2. I think angry as the devil. | 2. I think warm and cuddly. |

In each case, statement #2 doesn't make sense grammatically; therefore, we can be certain these are true feelings. Generally, the words that follow are feeling words.

Negative

mad	sad	irked	scared	crummy	hurt	angry	spiteful
cold	distant	rejected	jealous	numb	cranky	picky	anxious

Positive

glad	happy	good	loving	warm	tingly	inspired	jubilant
ecstatic	sexy	sensuous	beautiful	accepted	close	tender	whole

None of these make sense when preceded by “I think...” All of these make sense when preceded by “I feel...”

¹Crosby, John F. (1985). *Illusion and disillusion: The self in love and marriage*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Day 4

What I Like About Our Marriage

We all like positive feedback, to have someone say something nice about us. Yet, we generally do not say nice things as often as we should — or hear them as often as we would like. This section is devoted simply to giving some positive feedback.

Activity #4: Giving Positive Feedback

1. In your notebook, write five things you like about your marriage or about being married to your spouse in particular. Use the “I” message model for phrasing them. For example, “I feel secure being married to you because I need someone to lean on at times and you are a good person to lean on.”

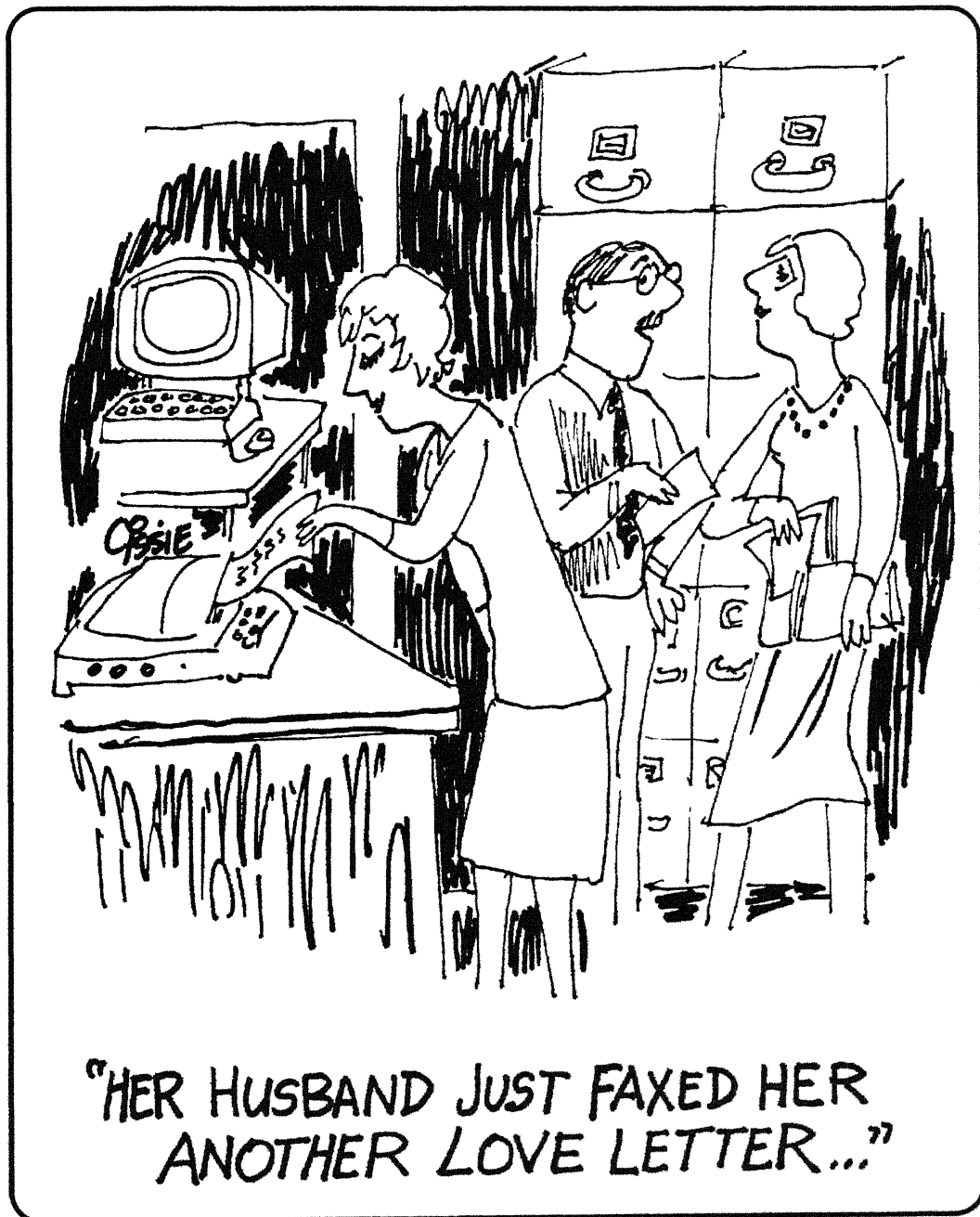
2. Take turns reading these to each other and responding with active listening.

Day 5

Love Letters

Do you remember the love feelings you had for your spouse when you were first married? After the wedding, as the years roll by, these feelings often get lost. You begin to take each other for granted as family, friends, work respon-

sibilities, and other obligations compete for your time and energy. You fail to express love and affection for your spouse and, therefore, may be failing to give him or her the feeling (and security) of being a very important person in your life



"Love is a powerful feeling that releases the potential of one person to strive for his dreams without threat of judgment; to momentarily overcome his need for the need of another; to be patient and not lose his feelings of worth as the struggle to find meaning with the other person occurs and as bridges between individual differentness are built..."

— Virginia Satir

Activity #5: Writing a Love Letter

Imagine you and your spouse have been separated for a month or more. Write a love letter to your spouse. Include only the usual components of a love letter. For example, you may write about how you miss your spouse, how you enjoyed the last time you were together, or what you plan to do when you see each other again. Omit the news part like "Johnny went to the dentist today." Write a real love letter.

Then put it in an envelope addressed to your spouse, put a stamp on it and mail it.

Begin to express your feelings of love and tenderness for your spouse to him or her on a regular basis. It may be difficult at first, but will get easier and easier the more you do it.

Day 6

Qualities of a Successful Marriage

The late David Mace, a well-known marriage counselor, identified eight qualities necessary for a successful marriage.

These eight qualities are:

1. The spouses respect each other.
2. They meet crises successfully.
3. They are loyal and faithful to each other.
4. They reinforce and support each other.
5. They are truthful and open with each other.
6. They share the same basic values.
7. They are mutually affectionate.
8. They share the same goals.

How many of these qualities exist in your marriage?



Activity #6: Identifying Positive Qualities of your Marriage

Review Mace's list of eight qualities necessary for a successful marriage. Pick three or four of these qualities that are present in your marriage.

In your notebook, write specific ways that your spouse exhibits these qualities. For example, in regard to #1, you might write: "You show that you respect me by listening carefully to my opinion when we must make a decision."

The next step is to read what you have written to your spouse.

Take turns sharing. Again, this is a good time to practice your communication skills.

Day 7

Synergy

A well-known love poem contains this line: "I love you not only for what you are, but for what I am when I am with you." This conveys the idea of synergy — that one plus one equals more than two. The sum of the parts working together is greater than the sum of the parts working separately. In the case of a marriage, two spouses working together cooperatively can achieve more than two spouses working independently of one another.

*Synergy:
Every part of a
system cooperating,
working together.*

Activity #7: Reflecting on the "Sum"

In your notebook, write something that you are that you would not be if you had not married your spouse. For example, one husband wrote, "I am a better businessman because of you. Not that you taught me about business. It's just that I know you were backing me emotionally and would still love me even if the business failed. That gave me courage to try new things, to take risks."

Share what you have written with your spouse.

Day 8

Expectations of Marriage

One reason for marital dissatisfaction is that couples expect a great deal from marriage. Wives and husbands often have unrealistic expectations about what marriage should provide them. Most people expect their spouses to be sources of emotional support, companionship, sexual satisfaction, and economic support or assistance. That's a pretty big order. The gap between expectation and perceived performance produces disappointment, discouragement and, finally, disillusion-

ment. When our expectations are not met and we are unhappy, we will likely say something about it. On the other hand we may neglect to give positive feedback when our expectations are met.

In healthy relationships, each partner tries to understand and respond to the other's expectations while articulating his or her own. The following activity will help you and your spouse express expectations and give positive feedback to one another.

Activity #8: Expressing Your Marriage Expectations

In your notebook, write three expectations you had of your marriage or of your spouse that have been met. Then write how they were met. For example, "I expected that marriage to you would provide me with emotional security. You have made me feel emotionally secure by showing me in many ways that you love me and want to spend your life with me. For example, I like the way you include me in decisions regarding your retirement."

Read your expectations and the ways they have been met to each other.

Beliefs That Sabotage Relationships²

Our beliefs about the ways people “operate” can enhance our personal relationships — or create problems in them. Some common myths about other people’s behavior that can create problems in relationships are:

Myth #1: Other people, objects, or situations can make me feel some emotion.

The truth is that situations and inanimate objects cannot make us feel anything any more than other people can make us feel anything. We usually choose to feel certain ways and to respond in certain ways. If you believe that you never have any choice as to how you feel and react, then you have no control over the situation.

It is best to own your feelings (“I feel...”). Take responsibility for them and your own behavior.

Myth #2: I should always have good reasons why I am feeling anxious or upset about something even though I may not be able to figure out why.

If you believe that you must always have good reasons for feeling the way you do, then what happens when you’re not able to come up with an explanation? Denial of the feelings? Give yourself (or your partner) permission to have these feelings as your truth for the moment. Remember J-U-D-E: You don’t have to *Justify*, *Understand*, *Defend*, or *Explain* your feelings to yourself or others. It is healthier for a relationship if you learn how to stop judging your own feelings and those of your partner.

Myth #3: My partner should automatically know what I want without me having to share this information with him or her.

When you relieve yourself of the responsibility to clearly communicate your needs to your partner, you unfairly place upon him or her the impossible burden of reading your mind. If the signals are not picked up or are misinterpreted, it is easy to justify feeling hurt or angry. To cling to this belief is to set yourself up for hurt and disappointment.

These beliefs are often unconscious, but you can become aware of them by observing your own behavior and by asking yourself these questions:

1. Do I believe that someone or something else is responsible for my own painful feelings, or do I accept that I generally create an emotional experience?
2. Do I believe that I need to justify, understand, defend, or explain my feelings, or do I just allow myself to feel them?
3. Do I believe that the people who love me should magically know what I want and expect of them, or do I clearly inform them of my needs and desires?

Getting in touch with your feelings, understanding what control you exert over them, and learning to effectively express your feelings can enhance your personal relationships. Part of the process is letting go of any myths you may now believe.

²Hillig, Chuck (1985). Your beliefs can sabotage your relationships. In L. Cargan (Ed.), *Marriage and family: Coping with change* (pp. 182-184). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Day 9

Private Thoughts

By this time (in this program and in your marriage), there are many thoughts and feelings you have shared with your spouse. However, there are probably some important things about yourself — thoughts, feelings, personal experiences, dreams, etc. — that you

have never shared with your mate. It's not that these things have necessarily been a secret; it's just that you never thought to share them before or you were a little reluctant to share them.

Mutual self-disclosure — both spouses opening themselves to the other one — is the



basis for deep friendship within a marriage.

Yet, it is a risk-taking behavior. The ability to self-disclose happens only to the extent you are able to endure anxiety and discomfort.

Because it is risky, sharing private thoughts requires that you trust your marriage partner, and feel that he/she supports and values you.

The use of effective communication skills also makes self-disclosure more meaningful to your relationship.

This may be a difficult activity for you. Take a chance though. Remember, in intimate relationships, sharing private thoughts is the key to growth and joy, to spontaneity and vitality, to depth and meaning.

Activity #9: Sharing a Private Thought

Today, you are to share something with your spouse you have never shared before. It's not that this thought has been a secret. Perhaps you've never thought to share it before or were a little reluctant to share it until now.

Write down in your notebook what you wish to share. It may be a dream, a wish, a feeling, a goal, an ambition, a desire, a meaningful poem, or a sexual fantasy.

Next, share your thoughts with your spouse. Take turns reading your thoughts to each other.

Guidelines for Sharing Private Thoughts

1. Respect and accept another person's self-disclosure without trying to change it. Allow the person to feel and think as he/she wishes.
2. Be willing to risk.
3. Let others volunteer their self-disclosure.

Day 10

A Negotiation Process

Negotiation is a communication process that permits a couple to fit their actions together in organized, purposeful ways to achieve goals they share. Negotiation can ease the strain when couples are in conflict or, when a relationship is generally satisfactory, it can be

an effective way of settling practical issues of some importance. For example, a negotiation process can resolve difficulties over how to spend time or who performs various tasks.

Negotiation permits two people to incorporate new growth or newly discovered personal



needs into their style of interaction. It allows a couple to adapt in a world of changing levels of pressure, unexpected crises, and endless activities. Elements of successful marital negotiation include:

- **Information.** It is advantageous to share more, rather than less, information in marital negotiating. Otherwise, the intentions, desires, concerns, or objections of one spouse may not be fully understood by the other spouse.
- **Support.** Communicate confidence and support by telling of your support for each other and your desire to help your spouse obtain satisfaction.
- **Voluntary participation of both spouses.** This depends on whether or not a couple believes that joint outcomes are more advantageous than separate attempts to get things done. Couples can create this belief if they operate on the following assumptions: a) maintenance and growth of the marriage are an outcome of highest priority; b) each partner must achieve some satisfaction from negotiating and must provide some support for the other; and c) what each does or wants must be acceptable to the other.
- **Time.** If there is not enough time to deal with issues at a given point, it is not appropriate to try to reach a settlement. However, some time limits are important for negotiating. This tends to push people to complete the entire procedure more rapidly than when unlimited time is available.

- **Flexibility and trust.** Flexibility is the willingness to compromise. Trust is a belief or confidence in the honesty, integrity, and reliability of another person. The higher the levels of trust, that is, the more each spouse believes the other will fulfill any arrangements they work out, the greater the flexibility of both spouses is likely to be.
- **Effective communication.** The effectiveness of negotiation can be decreased by “negative” communication: A stiff posture, poor eye contact, slouching, inattentiveness and frequent interrupting. When each person uses effective communication skills (attentive posture, eye contact, etc.) and appears involved and cooperative, it tends to be more beneficial for both.

Negotiations may vary from being “one shot” to being repeated. In “one shot” negotiations, partners pose a problem, negotiate, arrive at an outcome, and that outcome persists more or less indefinitely. Repeated negotiations take place over an extended period of time. Repeated negotiations are necessary when the issue being discussed is more serious or the spouses have more disagreement about it. In any case, the chief outcome of successful negotiation is the confidence that things can be changed and problems can be worked out. Remember that negotiation is a communication process that enables two people to maintain a balance between being separate individuals and being marital partners.

Activity #10: Negotiation

This activity will take you through a negotiation process. This process can be very useful in reducing problems or conflicts — simple or complex — within your marital relationship.

Try the negotiation steps as outlined below and become familiar with them. Later, as you get better at negotiating, you may want to modify this process somewhat to increase your level of comfort. Let these steps be a suggested guide, not hard, fast rules that control everything you say or do.

Be aware that it may be a bit awkward in the beginning if you are not used to this kind of interaction. After following the process several times, if you still feel awkward with it, modify it so that you feel comfortable with it.

Try negotiating “easy problems” the first few times you follow these steps. Examples of “easy problems” might include who picks up the children after work, who cooks dinner when, and how to spend family time. Once both feel comfortable with this process, more serious conflicts can be negotiated.

Choose one issue or problem to be discussed, then follow these steps in the negotiation process:

Step 1: Set the stage.

Determine where, when and for how long the discussion will take place. Make sure the discussion occurs in a place where both spouses feel comfortable talking about the issue — preferably a place that is quiet and undisturbed. Set up an “appointment” for this interaction and plan enough time to discuss the issue.

Step 2: Identify the problem without distractions.

A distraction is anything that “moves” the discussion away from the issue. Typical distractions are: Avoiding identifying the issue, blaming someone for the problem, creating confusion, allowing interruptions, arguing over fault, and “setting people up” through praise. State the issue simply and without blame.

Step 3: Immediately suggest a possible solution.

Try to avoid “dumping” problems by making others come up with a solution. Give them something to work with by suggesting “one possible solution” to the problem. Solutions go over better when you agree to change or give up something as a part of the solution.

Step 4: Be a flexible “bargainer.”

Listen if the other person wants a different solution and see if some compromise where both people are satisfied may work best. You may want to explore several different alternatives.

Step 5: Summarize the solution.

In some way, summarize the agreement and how both spouses will contribute to the solution. It is often useful to make a “trial” agreement knowing you can come back to renegotiate if necessary.

Day 11

Sexual Feedback

While a day-to-day relationship requires much more, sexual responsiveness is basic to a satisfying marital relationship.

Talking to your spouse about your sexual needs and desires is important and contributes to increased pleasure and intimacy. Have you told your spouse lately what excites and pleases you? He/she would probably be glad to hear it, even if he/she already knows it.

Activity #11: Talking About Sex

Think: What sexual activity pleases you most? Specifically, what does your partner do that “turns you on?”

Write your responses in your notebook. Or, if you wish, you may write them on a separate piece of paper and destroy it later.

Remember to be specific.

Take turns reading your responses to each other. Practice active listening. It may surprise you to find that some seemingly insignificant thing you do is very meaningful to your partner.

Day 12

Ten and Ten

You have made quite a journey together to get to this point — the final day of activities in your marital enrichment plan. Do not take this as a signal to stop! Continue to share, to grow, to work toward realizing your potential. You may

wish to repeat many activities or try some given in Appendix D. You are also encouraged to read the next section — Realizing Your Marriage Potential — and do the suggested activity. Good luck as you continue to grow.

Activity #12: Taking Ten and Ten

1. Each day take 10 minutes to write down some of your thoughts and feelings about your day, about life, about your future, or about some of the topics suggested below. You may do this exercise for as many days as you wish. Try to do it for at least 10 days.

Possible Topics

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| My spiritual needs | My greatest fear |
| My love for you | A pleasing thought when thinking of you |
| My love for our child/children | How our relationship is growing |
| My goal(s) five years from now | The ways in which I care for you |
| Our sexual relationship | |

2. Take 10 minutes to share these thoughts with your partner.

IV. Realizing Your Marriage Potential

Most couples who marry wish to have a happy and satisfying relationship. However, as a husband once said, "It is not so much that 20th century marriages have been tried and found wanting, but they have been wanted and largely untried."³ What does this mean? It means there is a great difference between "getting" married and "being" married. Getting married means meeting the legal and religious requirements of the state or religious denomination.

Being married, on the other hand, is a life-time process — not a one-time event. Therefore,

³Lessor, Richard (1971). *Love, marriage, & trading stamps* Chicago, IL. Argus Communications.

it involves an effort on the part of both members of the marital pair to make marriage work.

Many people who marry behave in a way that indicates that getting married and being married are the same — that one does "get married and live happily ever after." As we are discovering from a high divorce rate in society, this is not necessarily so. Many couples do not realize their marriage potential together. They do not understand that a marriage consists of me, you, and us. In order for a relationship to form and develop, it must be molded and nourished. Couples should routinely set aside time to do things together they enjoy. It requires commitment to allow each other to grow and de-



velop as a person, while at the same time working at the marriage in order to develop its potential as well. It requires the development of certain skills in the areas of communication, creative conflict management, cooperation, sexual fulfillment, meeting the needs of the other, and decision-making. A satisfying marriage also requires regular marital tune-ups just as your automobile needs maintenance. This may range in complexity from an “oil change” to a “major overhaul.” If your marriage is going to last a lifetime (longer than any machine), and if it is to perform efficiently and in a way satisfactory to both partners, then it, too, must have a lot of care and maintenance.

The “Marriage Potential Inventory”

The “Marriage Potential Inventory” described below helps couples assess the present “state of their marriage” and develop an action plan for marital maintenance. It helps couples honestly look at their relationships so they can realize more of their marriage potential. This inventory involves reviewing the following eleven aspects of married life to determine how satisfied each spouse is now. Read through the following very carefully and then complete the Marriage Potential Inventory Worksheet. You may want to refer back to this section as you are doing your worksheet.

1. Common goals and values. What are your marital goals? How similar are your and your spouse’s goals for the marriage? What are your personal goals? How well do you support each other in the achievement of individual and marital goals? How similar are you in setting priorities based on goals and values? Is your behavior consistent with your goals?

2. Communication skills. Is your relationship “safe” enough to share? Can you share not only your opinions but also your feelings of hurt, joy, love, or anger? How well do you understand what your partner really means when he/she is talking with you? How well do you listen to your partner?

3. Creative use of conflict. When in conflict with your partner, to what extent do you withdraw, sulk, cry, or say things that hurt? Can you use conflict as an opportunity to

develop respect? Can you negotiate and find solutions together? Do you always want to “win” in a conflict situation — to make the other person do it “your way?” A disagreement is a “choice-point” in the relationship.

4. Agreement on gender roles. How well do you both agree on who is the breadwinner? Who will care for and nurture the children? Who decides upon a move to enhance career opportunities? What is the male role in your marriage? What is the female role? How well do you agree on the sharing of different household tasks?

5. Sexual fulfillment. To what extent are you satisfied with your sexual relationship. This includes tenderness, foreplay, orgasmic response, feelings of excitement and well-being.

6. Money management. How well do you set priorities together on the spending of money? Are both partners’ interests, concerns and priorities listened to and considered in money decisions?

7. Cooperation and teamwork. Do you pull together as a team or are you pulling in opposite directions? Are you cooperating instead of competing? Do you want to “win” rather than support?

8. Appreciation and affection. Do you say words of appreciation and affection such as “thank you,” “I certainly appreciate what you did,” and “I love you.” Do you show appreciation and affection by what you do in your behavior toward each other?

9. Commitment to growth. Are you both committed to the growth of each other as persons? Are you committed to the growth of your relationship regarding time, effort and money?

10. Decision-making skills. How well can you analyze a problem in a step-by-step manner? Do you anticipate the consequences of your decision? Do you consider several alternate solutions to the problem? Do you include each other in major decisions?

11. Effectiveness in parenting (for parents). How well do you agree in the discipline of your children? Do you spend enough time with each child? How consistent are you in nurturing and caring for your children? Are you satisfied with how you handle a child’s misbehavior?

His Marriage Potential Inventory Worksheet⁴

For the 11 areas given below, analyze your marriage now in terms of your satisfaction with it. Evaluate where you are now in realizing all of the possible potential of your marriage. To do this, use the following 0-10 continuum scale:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Very unsatisfied; no potential realized											Very satisfied; all potential realized

On the chart below, place your rating under the column marked actual. Then evaluate your marriage in terms of where you would like to be (desired) in each area. For example, you might place a "4" in the area of "communication skills" under actual, but a "9" under desired.

	Actual	Desired	Unrealized Potential
1. Common goals and values	_____	_____	_____
2. Communication skills	_____	_____	_____
3. Creative use of conflict	_____	_____	_____
4. Agreement on gender roles	_____	_____	_____
5. Sexual fulfillment	_____	_____	_____
6. Money management	_____	_____	_____
7. Cooperation and teamwork	_____	_____	_____
8. Appreciation and affection	_____	_____	_____
9. Commitment to growth	_____	_____	_____
10. Decision-making skills	_____	_____	_____
11. Parent effectiveness (if children)	_____	_____	_____
TOTAL	_____	_____	_____

After completing the first two columns for each of the 11 areas, compare the actual with the desired. Subtract each number in the actual column from the corresponding number in the desired column. Place the difference in the scores in the unrealized potential column. Total all scores in the actual column, the desired column, and the unrealized potential column and compare them. The total score in the unrealized potential column refers to how much more satisfaction and joy you and your partner could attain in your marriage. If you are less than fully satisfied now, look at your potential with your spouse. Unrealized potential often is due to 1) lack of time or effort; 2) lack of skills in communication, cooperation, or conflict management; 3) lack of fulfillment of each other's affection, sexual and security needs; and 4) not sharing common marital and life goals. Most couples have a great deal of unrealized potential in their relationship, but it takes a lifetime of sharing and caring to realize it. Share the results of this worksheet with your spouse. The two of you can then work together to develop a Marriage Potential Action Plan.

⁴Adapted from "Marriage Potential Test," by David and Vera Mace.

His Marriage Potential Action Plan

Because it is inappropriate to put off until tomorrow what we can do today, an action plan should be developed to enable you and your partner to realize your marriage potential.

In areas where there is a difference between actual satisfaction and desired satisfaction of the marriage relationship, think about specific steps and behaviors you can take to increase the satisfaction and intimacy in each area. If you decide to specify action in one or more areas, determine what you will do, when you will go about it, and how you will go about it. Be specific in terms of behaviors. Also, focus on changing your own behavior, not your spouse's behavior.

If you decide that there are several areas in terms of unrealized potential, decide which should have highest priority and which one you wish to start on first. Rank order the areas in terms of priority (1, 2, 3, 4) and work on one area at a time. Remember, change is a slow, deliberate process and may require you to start over occasionally.

1. Area of unrealized potential _____

What I (we) will do to reach potential _____

How I (we) will do it _____

When I (we) will do it _____

Where I (we) will do it _____

2. Area of unrealized potential _____

What I (we) will do to reach potential _____

How I (we) will do it _____

When I (we) will do it _____

Where I (we) will do it _____

3. Area of unrealized potential _____

What I (we) will do to reach potential _____

How I (we) will do it _____

When I (we) will do it _____

Where I (we) will do it _____

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5. Sexual fulfillment	_____	_____	_____
6. Money management	_____	_____	_____
7. Cooperation and teamwork	_____	_____	_____
8. Appreciation and affection	_____	_____	_____
9. Commitment to growth	_____	_____	_____
10. Decision-making skills	_____	_____	_____
11. Parent effectiveness (if children)	_____	_____	_____
TOTAL	_____	_____	_____

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Her Marriage Potential Action Plan

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In those areas where there is a difference between actual satisfaction and desired satisfaction of the marriage relationship, think about specific steps and behaviors you can take to increase the satisfaction and intimacy in each area. If you decide to specify action in one or more areas, determine what you will do, when you will go about it, and how you will go about it. Be specific in terms of behaviors. Also, focus on changing your own behavior, not your spouse's behavior. If you decide that there are several areas in terms of unrealized potential, decide which should have highest priority and which one you wish to start on first. Rank the areas in terms of priority (1, 2, 3, 4) and work on one area at a time. Remember, change is a slow, deliberate process and may require you to start over occasionally.

1. Area of unrealized potential _____

What I (we) will do to reach potential _____

How I (we) will do it _____

When I (we) will do it _____

Where I (we) will do it _____

2. Area of unrealized potential _____

What I (we) will do to reach potential _____

How I (we) will do it _____

When I (we) will do it _____

Where I (we) will do it _____

3. Area of unrealized potential _____

What I (we) will do to reach potential _____

How I (we) will do it _____

When I (we) will do it _____

Where I (we) will do it _____

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Appendices

Appendix A *Reluctant Partners*

A Note to Those Whose Spouses Choose Not to Participate:

You may be at a point where you're ready to really work on your marriage, to "recharge" it. This program — the ideas and activities — is exciting to you. Yet, your spouse is reluctant — or simply refuses to participate in the program with you. Now what?

It is possible for an individual to gain from a marital enrichment self-study program even if his or her partner chooses not to participate. You can read the information, develop an understanding of the concepts and skills discussed, and practice the skills to incorporate them into your own behavior. You can feel good about what you are learning and your own personal growth. However, your new found knowledge and behaviors can backfire on you unless you follow these guidelines:

1. Before beginning the program, discuss it with your spouse. It is best to let him or her know your intentions and your reasons for wanting to do this. It is not an attempt to manipulate, but a vehicle to promote your own growth and development in the relationship.
2. Share your "new" knowledge with your spouse. Discuss what you're learning and what

you think it means for your marriage.

3. As you move through each part of the program, "warn" your spouse before trying out a new skill or one of the activities on him/her. For example, you may want to change your communication style. As you practice this new skill, let your spouse know what you are doing.

4. Be accepting of your spouse's decision not to participate — do not criticize, berate or place blame. Such behavior will foster a stronger negative reaction and alienate your spouse.

5. Be enthusiastic — but not overwhelmingly so. Your enthusiasm and positive response to new ideas can create interest on the part of your spouse. On the other hand, "too much of a good thing" might threaten him/her.

6. Use "natural" opportunities to share what you are learning: When your spouse asks a question about it; when something relevant occurs in a movie or television show you are watching together; etc.

It is possible for you to learn some things "on your own." Don't be discouraged by your spouse's reluctance. As you benefit from your new knowledge and skills, and your spouse observes this, he/she may decide to "join you." Good luck.

Appendix B

Does your Marriage Need Professional Help?

There is no simple formula that will tell you when to see a counselor or therapist. In general, many love relationships or family systems could benefit from enrichment through professional counseling. When there are problems in a love relationship or family system, it is wise to seek professional help as soon as possible. This need not be a “last-ditch remedy.” Some couples wait too long before getting help; the problem gets worse and becomes more difficult to solve. Nevertheless, it is never too late to make constructive changes in a marriage as long as there is still some love, some commitment, and the motivation to work things out.

Sometimes stress or pain in the family becomes so severe that the involved individuals cannot function effectively in their work or at home. It may be obvious to others that outside help is needed. Sometimes a friend, pastor or supervisor at work will recommend counseling. Nevertheless, much of the time, those directly involved are unaware of or will deny the severity of the problem and of the need for outside help.

The following are indicators of high stress levels in marital systems. Knowledge of these may help you and your spouse decide whether or not to seek professional counseling or therapy.

- When there is a constant sense of urgency and hurry with no time to rest or relax.
- When there is never time to discuss troublesome issues.
- When there are always feelings of frustration over not getting things done.
- When, in trying to make a decision, your interaction quickly reverts to being critical of your partner and blaming that person for the deficits in your marriage relationship.
- When, after a solution to a problem is made, something always seems to prevent it from being carried out.
- When trying to change your behavior, things get worse rather than better.
- When fewer and fewer things in the relationship seem to make sense.

- When one person is quite sure that he/she is OK — it is the partner who needs help.
- When no matter what one partner does or doesn't do, the other continues to feel depressed.
- When you find you are having less and less intimate contact or communication with your partner, and/or are enjoying it less.
- When your sexual relationship is declining in frequency, intensity and satisfaction.
- When more and more of your time, energy, and effort is devoted to children, work, organizations, and friends, and less and less is devoted to your partner.
- When there is a nagging desire for a simpler life.
- When you often wish you had not gotten married.
- When you have increasing or unexplained physical complaints or problems.

While the above indicators can signal distress in the marital system, it would be much better if such problems could be prevented. Couples without any (or many) obvious problems may want to go to a professional for enrichment of relationships and strengthening of systems that could prevent many problems from developing. Should you decide to see a professional counselor or marital and family therapist, here are some suggestions for you to consider:

1. Shop around. For example:
 - a. Ask people you trust who may be able to help you locate a counselor or therapist. You might ask:
 - friends or relatives who have benefited from counseling in the past
 - a minister, priest, rabbi, family physician or other professional
 - a local mental health association
 - a community mental health center or family service agency
 - b. Check the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory under “Marriage and Family Counselors.”

2. Look for the most qualified professional you can find. Ask: What training and experience does this person have? For a marital and family therapist, is he/she certified by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (A.A.M.F.T.)? How many years experience does the person have?
3. "Interview" prospective therapists to determine how well they can meet your needs. For example, how flexible are their hours? Do they work in the evenings or on Saturdays? Will they see spouses individually as well as together? How will the counselor determine the number of sessions needed? How often will "progress" be evaluated?
4. Look for a professional whose personality and values are compatible with your own. This is usually determined through conversation and may take some time. Once you have selected a counselor or therapist, you may decide he or she is not meeting your needs. If so, don't just quit. Shop around again. The present therapist might even be able to recommend someone you would work with better.

Appendix C

Suggested Readings

For those wishing to do more in-depth study of interpersonal relationships and skills necessary to the development and maintenance of effective interpersonal relationships, a number of helpful books are available. To gain the greatest benefit from any of the books you choose to read, it is suggested that you and your spouse read them "together." For tips on this, see the section on "Reading a Book Together."

The books listed here should be available through your local public library or a bookstore. If a book is not on the library shelf when you want it, ask that it be put on reserve for you. If any of these books are not listed in the card catalogue of your local library, ask your librarian if they are available through the interlibrary loan service. The librarian might also be able to recommend some other titles to you.

Benton, Joanna (1983). *Keeping close: How to make your relationship work*. Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press.

Bienvenu, Millard, Sr. (1986). *Strengthen your marriage through better communication*. New York, NY: Public Affairs Committee. (To order, send \$1.00 to Public Affairs Pamphlets, 381 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. Request Public Affairs Pamphlet #642).

Bolton, Robert (1986). *People skills: How to assert yourself, listen to others and resolve conflicts*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

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Reading a Book Together

Many people benefit more from reading a book or article if they read and discuss it with someone. For couples who decide to engage in this activity together, it is recommended that:

1. You jointly select the books or articles. The topic should be of interest to both of you.
2. You decide what procedure will be followed. Will you read each chapter and then discuss it? Read two or more chapters and then discuss them? Will you read a chapter together (for example, taking turns reading aloud to one another) and then discuss it? The options are many, but the procedure selected should be agreeable to both spouses.
3. You set aside a specific time to do the reading.
4. You set aside a specific time to discuss what you have read. Some questions suggested for spouses to ask each other and to use as a discussion guide include:
 - What is the major point or concept made in this chapter, book or article?
 - What is the most important thing you learned?
 - What information do you think is the most relevant for where you're at in this relationship?
 - How did you feel when you were reading that chapter, book or article? (Be specific).
 - Is there anything you would like to do differently — for yourself, for me, or for our relationship — as a result of reading this?
 - If there is something you would like to change, how can I help you to do that?

The discussion need not be limited to these questions, but they might provide a good starting point.

Appendix D

"Time Out" for your Marriage: More Suggested Activities

The marriage that two people have, both now and in the future, is what they create together. By participating in the marriage enrichment program *Choice, Not Chance: Enhancing Your Marital Relationship*, you have been about the business of creating your marriage, renewing your love for and commitments to one another. You can repeat the 12 activities in the marriage enrichment program many times. You may also choose to engage in other activities to keep your marriage alive and vital. Suggestions for additional activities include:

1. Take your spouse on a date once-a-month. When you take your partner out, you are responsible for doing something that pleases him/her.
2. Give each other unexpected gifts that show you care.
3. Say something nice to each other at least once a day for a week. At the end of the week, discuss: How did you feel when I paid you a compliment? (Remember: Focus on feelings).
4. Write a thank-you note thanking your spouse for something he/she did.

5. Remember birthdays and anniversaries or other special moments you have had together.
6. Hire a babysitter occasionally to do the dinner dishes and watch the kids while you and your spouse go for a walk. (One couple did this several times each week rather than postpone together-time until the weekend).
7. Take a three day "marriage maintenance" weekend, away from children, work and other distractions, every three or four months.
8. Take advantage of personal and marriage enrichment events offered in your community. Examples of such events include workshops on communication, problem-solving, or assertiveness skills; seminars on managing money/finances; and programs on couple communication. These may be offered by churches, the Cooperative Extension Service, continuing education programs, mental health centers, or local hospitals.
9. Send your spouse a card for no special reason. Write a note in it telling your spouse something you like about him/her.
10. If you feel "stuck" and think you are not experiencing the comfortableness, satisfaction and enjoyment that is possible in your marriage, see a qualified marriage and family counselor or therapist.

Behaviors I Like

Ten behaviors that usually bring fulfillment and happiness to marriage partners have been identified as:

- Holding my hand.
- Touching me affectionately.
- Calling me by an endearing name.
- Expressing your love to me.
- Thanking me for doing something.
- Being patient when I make a mistake.
- Taking time to listen when I need to talk.
- Trying to brighten me up.
- Writing me a love note or love letter.
- Telling me things you appreciate about me.

Consider these ten behaviors. You and your spouse should separately rank each of these behaviors from one to ten. One is the behavior you appreciate most. Ten is the one you appreciate least (a ranking of nine or ten does not mean the behavior is not appreciated by you, just that it has lower priority).

Next, ask yourself: "How often do I engage in these behaviors with my partner?" "Do I do this often enough?"

Each of you should now share your rankings and your evaluations with your partner. Pay special attention to the behaviors ranked high by your partner. Ask him/her: "Do I do this often enough to please you?" If the answer is no, ask: "How often would you like me to do this and in what manner?"

Resolve to make a sincere effort to meet your partner's needs in these areas.

Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread, remade all the time, made new.
—Ursula K. LeGuin

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