

Relationship Transformers:

Our favorite tools for creating healing relationships

THE Relationship Commitment

“We commit to being honest and kind in all our communication with each other, and to helping each other honor this commitment.”

Honesty means:

- Knowing what you are thinking and feeling.
- Sharing every thought and feeling that is difficult to share, the withholding of which would create distance in the relationship.

Withholding thoughts and feelings creates separation in the relationship. By being more committed to seeing and sharing the truth than to protecting one's position, belief and/or self-image, we create trust in a relationship.

Kindness is the natural expression of soft-belly/soft-body. Kindness promotes openness and vulnerability, and creates a safe space for compassionate (to self-and-other) speaking and listening – the ability to hear and be heard.

THE Relationship Commitment fosters presence, allowing one to see in self-and-other what gets in the way of giving and receiving love, and how to move through these barriers. THE Relationship Commitment moves us in the direction of taking full responsibility for what we create in the relationship. It opens the possibility of working together with one's partner to resolve conflict in a non-adversarial manner, working from the same side, instead of opposing sides. These are essential ingredients in creating a loving, emotionally and spiritually intimate relationship.

THE Relationship Formula

I believe 95% of all conflicts in relationships are due to both people being unconsciously needy at the same time and colliding at the “needy intersection.” If you base your relationship life on this simple, profound tool, you will absolutely transform all your relationships.

1. Ask yourself, “What am I feeling right now?” (And let yourself know what that is!)
2. Ask yourself, “What do I need right now?” or “What does this feeling need right now?” (It is good to see that most, if not all of the time, when a couple has a fight both parties are needing something they are not asking for.)
3. Ask for what you need.
4. Deal with the consequences.

Comment: If you hold back (from yourself as well as your partner), you create a gap that will widen over time until the inevitable separation (emotional and/or physical) occurs. Don't hold back especially the things that are difficult to share. I am a huge believer in impeccable honesty.

Note: An excellent book that describes this process in detail is *Nonviolent Communication*, by Marshall Rosenberg

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The Needs List

As I stated in THE Relationship Formula above, 95% of all conflicts in relationships are the result of unconscious and/or unexpressed needs. So, it only makes sense to make known to oneself and one's partner precisely what one's needs are. The following tool does this and points out where it is most important for a couple to focus their work.

1. Both partners write a complete list of everything they need from the other person and are not getting to their satisfaction, plus everything they are getting that they don't want.
2. Prioritize the list, putting the most important item first, and being especially mindful to get the top 10 needs in their proper order.
3. Share your lists with each other. Go down the lists in order of priorities. Tell each other whether or not you can commit to each item on the other person's list. When you get to an item you cannot commit to, this is where you need to begin your work. Also, if you commit to an item, but cannot honor that commitment consistently, this is another place that needs your attention.

The Listening Game

This is a tool that is most useful in learning how to hear what the other person is really saying, as opposed to what you think they are saying.

1. Partner A tells Partner B what s/he would like him/her to understand. The sharing needs to be direct and to the point – a few sentences at most.
2. Partner B repeats what s/he heard Partner A said, paraphrasing what s/he heard.
3. Partner A tells Partner B if s/he gets that Partner B understands what was shared. If Partner A does not feel Partner B really got it, the above process is repeated until Partner A gets that Partner B understands.
4. The roles are then reversed, with Partner B responding to what Partner A shared and Partner A responding until Partner B gets that s/he understands his/her response.
5. This process is repeated until both feel satisfied that they have reached a mutual understanding that is adequate for the time-being.

Freeze Frame

Freeze Frame is a wonderful tool that allows one to use the material of one's daily life to access the deeper issues that keep one from having what one really, really wants in one's life. One needs to set aside a period of time each day (usually near the end of the day) to review the events of the day and see what happened that created some level of dis-ease in one's Being. It is usually best to begin with the issue that one had the most intense reaction to.

In any conflict, both individuals are 100% responsible for the creation of the problem. Freeze Frame creates the possibility for two (or more) people to look together – from the same side – at an incident that caused a painful rift in the relationship. It helps both to take full responsibility for creating the problem, ending the blame/who's-right-who's-wrong dance. It lets each see how and why they created the issue to begin with. Both parties need to commit to discovering the truth in themselves, as opposed to taking, holding, and defending a position.

1. Partner A relates incident needing healing to partner B in as much detail as possible, paying particularly close attention to what s/he was feeling, especially immediately before the moment s/he felt hurt by partner B.

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2. Partner A replays the few moments immediately before the hurt, this time in very slow motion, paying even closer attention to what s/he was feeling.
3. When partner A gets to the precise moment where the hurt happened, s/he “freezes the frame” at the point where s/he was dealt the blow by partner B. Partner A does not move his/her awareness away from this awe-full moment in time, but instead drops his/her defenses, stays totally open, “takes the hit,” and sees what it touches in his/her consciousness.
4. That pain, if allowed to take one where it wants to, will eventually take the person back to an earlier (usually much earlier) pain that needs healing. One will see how s/he co-created the pain so that s/he could open the door to heal the old wound. Have you ever noticed how we recreate the same pain over and over in our lives until we finally stop running away and turn around to see what it is trying to tell us?
5. Once partner A has seen into the source of his/her pain, it is also possible from this place of open awareness to look at partner B in precisely the same “freeze the frame” moment and see/feel where s/he was coming from. At this point all that is in one’s heart is compassion, understanding and forgiveness.

Guided Heartwork

Guided Heartwork gives you an opportunity to directly experience the “classical” Heartwork process of surrendering into and through layer after layer of your false self until you arrive back in your true home. You can do this exercise alone or with another person facilitating your process. In working with a facilitator, you may choose either to share your work or to work entirely internally, signaling the facilitator (with a pre-arranged signal) when you are ready to go on to the next step in the Heartwork process. Please refer to “Facilitator’s Role” at the end of this section for suggestions about working with a facilitator.

The Heartwork process enables you to find your own unique way of looking into yourself. The following sequence, while representative of the stages that generally unfold during the course of a Heartwork session, may vary from person to person:

Getting Comfortable: In doing Heartwork, it is very important that you are physically comfortable. Being able to forget about your body as much as possible will allow you to focus all your attention on your internal process.

First, make any necessary adjustments in your environment. Where in the room would you be most comfortable? Where do you want your facilitator to be in relation to you, and in what bodily position? (It must be one that the facilitator is comfortable with.) If the room is too warm or too cool for your maximum comfort, adjust the temperature. If the room is too bright or dark, change the lighting. Adjust anything that interferes with your maximum physical comfort.

Now find the most comfortable position for your body. You may be most comfortable sitting erect, slouching, lying down (on your back, side or stomach) or in some other position. Ask your body what position it would most like to be in right now, and assume that position.

Settling In: Now close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and allow yourself to relax as much as possible. If you have difficulty letting go of some of the surface tensions, just watch your breath come in and go out for a few minutes until you feel as relaxed as you can be at this time.

In the Heartwork you are about to do, it is very helpful to adopt an open, friendly, curious attitude towards whatever you encounter on your inward journey. This welcoming attitude will allow you to “witness” your process non-judgmentally, making it easier to see whatever is there because you have a more aware and less “attached” mind-state.

Defining the Problem: Now define your problem as clearly and concisely as possible. Or ask yourself, “What is it I would like to change as a result of doing this process?” If you enter into the Guided Heartwork process with no

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clearly defined issue, you can simply ask yourself, “Of all the issues that are present in my life, which one most needs my attention right now?” and allow the issue needing attention to choose itself by coming to the foreground. Another way to do this step is to ask, “If I had encountered a genie who was willing to grant me one wish, what would that wish be?” If some problem other than the one you had intended to work on demands your attention, even if it seems irrelevant to the original problem, trust it and go with that issue.

Locating the Problem: In the witness state of mind, now look around in your body to find the area where the problem is centered—experienced as blocked energy, stress, anxiety, tension or pain. (“Body” refers to that place where you experience not only physical sensations, but also senses in a more subtle way.) Notice how deep inside your body it sits. You can work with thoughts or mental metaphors, sensations, feelings or visual images in this process.

Clarifying: Keeping your attention focused in this inner feeling-space, describe in as much detail as possible what you experience here. If you have difficulty getting in touch with what is happening in this place, you may find it helpful to ask curious questions, such as: How big is it? What's its shape? What color is it? What is it made of? What is the texture of its surface? What does it smell like? What is the feel of this thing? What's it like? What would this part of me say if it could talk? Vivid visual imagery, memories and intense feelings often arise at this stage of the inward-looking process.

Focusing: Now slowly and carefully move your awareness toward and ultimately into the very center, or point of greatest intensity, of this feeling-space. You may find it helpful to follow these steps:

1. Start by allowing your awareness to get close enough to the feeling-space to be able to experience the energy coming out of it. (Kind of like feeling the heat a hot stove gives off when you walk past it.) What is emanating from this place inside you that you have spent most of your life avoiding?
2. Then make direct contact with the “surface” of the space. Can you get close enough to this thing inside yourself to actually “touch” the surface of it with your awareness? What is it like? How does it feel?
3. Then “move” into the surface layer. Can you find a way to get inside it, to become one with it, to experience what this surface layer that splits you in two is like from the inside? See if you can determine exactly what it is made of. Take your time so you can experience every step of this most incredible journey. In so doing, you will begin to see exactly how you work and who you really are—beyond all your ideas, beliefs and images of who or what you thought you were.
4. Then move through this layer into the interior while still being in contact with the surface (only now from the inside). What is it like to be inside it? How does it feel? What do you sense in this space? Rest here for a few minutes and let yourself be. Let whatever wants to come into your consciousness arise—thoughts, feelings, images, memories or sensations.
5. Allow yourself next to let go of your grip on the surface layer and let yourself be drawn inwards, downwards, towards the center or bottom or other end of this yearning space—much like a magnet would draw you toward something. Let yourself go—slowly and with great awareness, allowing whatever wants to be revealed to you to come into consciousness.

Penetrating: As you move inward, you may become aware of reluctance, resistance, hesitation or fear that prevents you from entering into the next space. Work with each barrier that you encounter, gradually softening into the resistance. Or you may find a different way to get through the barrier, such as plunging into it, embracing it, merging with it, being filled by it, looking directly at or into it, caring about or surrendering to it. Ultimately, it makes no difference what means you use; the moment you make the decision to face the barrier directly, the barrier begins to open by itself.

And by the way, don't assume extensive spiritual practice or years in therapy are prerequisites. Sometimes people who have never done a stitch of inner work in their lives come all the way home in one session. And sometimes those with the most experience have the most difficulty because they think they know what to do. As in all things, it is helpful to avoid expectations as much as possible.

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Keep letting go, through layer after layer, until you get all the way to the center, bottom, end or other side of the inner space, or until you have gone as far as you feel you can go at this time.

Discovery: When you pass through this last barrier, you will usually enter into a wide-open space—experiencing a deep sense of peace, wholeness and oneness with the universe. Once you arrive here, or when you have gone as far as you can, rest in this space for a while. Remember what you went through to get here, so that you can find your way back whenever you want.

Look back at where you began this journey. Start with the problem you wished to change, as you originally defined it, and see how the work you have done relates to that problem. See how you created the suffering for yourself—how you moved out of this place of wholeness, connectedness and peace, how you forgot your deepest truth and how you became lost in fear, confusion and delusion. How can you relate differently to this problem when it arises in the future? Let yourself know that you can always return to this place whenever you are willing and that you can take however long it takes to come back again.

Re-entry: Now check to see if you wish to go further in the process of opening more deeply into the center of the problem. If you do, repeat any of the previous steps that would take you deeper, and continue the process until you are totally satisfied that you have gone as far as you can for now.

Closure: Do you feel complete? If not, take the time to say, feel or do whatever you need to in order to complete this experience. You may need to express feelings, integrate and assimilate insights or simply remain quiet.

Facilitator's Role:

The most important aspect of the facilitator's role is the creation of a safe space in which the person doing the exercise may look inward. To best facilitate the work, it is important that facilitators:

- Maintain a nonjudgmental attitude. This means valuing equally every aspect of the other person's work and being and placing no expectations or demands on the person to do something that he or she is unwilling or disinclined to do.
- Clearly convey to the person doing the work that he or she is in complete control of the entire process from beginning to end, including setting the pace, determining the timing and direction the work takes, and deciding when the work has gone far enough for a particular time.
- Communicate caring by being totally attentive to what the person doing the work is experiencing in the moment. This means temporarily shelving the intellect, which analyzes, labels and compartmentalizes what it perceives. Occasionally, the facilitator may (with the person's permission or requesting) support, encourage and add energy to the other person's work by placing his or her hand(s) on the area(s) of the person's body where the attention is being focused.
- Be creative and keep the process moving. Engaging intuition, the facilitator balances probing with silence in moving with the other person toward the center of his or her experience. The degree to which the facilitator is in touch with the center of his or her own being is the degree to which the facilitator is able to guide the person to his or her center.
- Maintain an awareness that the thoughts, feelings and sensations that arise are not who we really are. Remaining fully attentive, but not attached to the content, the facilitator communicates to the other person that it is possible to look at and be with what is happening without being overwhelmed.
- Be willing to be "real" with the other person—that is, to acknowledge one's own humanity and refrain from creating an illusion of perfection. The facilitator needs to be willing to admit to, and openly deal with, the "mistakes" generated by his or her own shortcomings. When a facilitator pretends omniscience and sets himself or herself above the other person (even when the facilitator is a professional counselor and the other person is a client), the facilitator reinforces any sense of powerlessness and low self-esteem that the other person may already have.

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- Sometimes it is helpful for the facilitator to share some of his or her own growth process. If, in the name of "professional distance," a counselor is unwilling to experience with a client the common humanity they share, both are robbed of the opportunity to share compassion (which means, literally, "to have passion with").
- Be aware that the facilitator is, at best, a catalyst for the other person's self-healing. In fact, one benefit of Heartwork is that it is reciprocal—providing both the facilitator and the person doing the exercise equal opportunity for looking inward.

Time Out

When things get heated as they do in any alive relationship between two people, it is often a good thing to take a time out. This means that one person says or signals that s/he wants a time out – a temporary cessation to the fighting – and the other person has already, previously, agreed to abide by the request. At this time, the two go separate ways with the sole purpose of seeing how – and why, if possible – they created the fight. When either party is ready to share what s/he has seen, that person offers to reconvene the discussion. When both parties are ready, the conversation continues, with both parties sharing what they have seen, and helping each other see more about their role in the creation of the conflict. The one condition to this tool is that whoever calls the time out will come back to discuss the issue within 24 hours, or whatever number of hours the two people agree upon as the maximum time tolerable.

Just Listening

Perhaps the greatest, most healing gift we can give another is the gift of unconditional presence. One way of working with the emotional material that is released through the previous exercises is a tool called "Just Listening." This exercise creates a spiritual/emotional environment wherein one person can unburden his/her soul in the sacred space provided by the other's love and compassionate listening. It is one of the best tools I know of for opening to and moving through the deep emotional material that prevents one from having what one really, really wants. If used regularly (at least weekly), it will transform one's life.

As with the previous exercises, "Just Listening" is fundamentally a very simple tool. The goal of "Just Listening" is simply to let go as deeply as possible into one's feelings around whatever issue is up for one. While the technique is very simple and straightforward, it is very easy to get lost in thoughts about the issue, instead of feelings, and often takes people a number of tries before they master it. The instructions below are for doing "Just Listening" with a partner:

1. Create a (physically) "sacred space" and set aside at least 4 hours where the two of you can be completely undisturbed.
2. Partner A lies down (experiment with the position that allows for the greatest ease of opening). Partner B sits next to partner A, without touching or looking at partner A, unless requested by partner A.
3. Partner A allows any and all feelings to be expressed that need to come out, not holding back anything, regardless of content or intensity. Partner A allows this releasing process to unfold until s/he feels absolutely complete/finished.
4. During this process, partner B just listens. Just listening means hearing the words of and feeling the feelings with (compassion literally means "to have passion with") partner A. If partner A is expressing difficult feelings towards/about partner B, partner B listens as if partner A was talking about someone else, and is just there for partner A. S/he does not spend even one second preparing a defense/rebuttal to partner A's expression of feelings. This exercise is absolutely not about being right. It is about getting to the heart of the matter for each individual. Partner B provides the safety of a compassionate external witness to allow partner A

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to explore uncharted and oftentimes frightening territory within him/herself. The only time partner B may say anything during this time is to remind partner A that s/he is exploring his/her feelings. One possible way this can be accomplished is for partner B to gently say to partner A, "That's a thought, not a feeling. What are you feeling?"

5. When partner A is done, partners A and B switch positions/roles. Partner B now has an opportunity to explore/express any and all feelings s/he needs to.

6. When partner B feels complete, partner a may have another opportunity to further explore his/her feelings.

7. When partner A is done, partner B may have another turn.

8. Partners A and B continue going back-and-forth until both feel satisfied that they have done all they can do at this time.

Legal Dump

When one partner is feeling upset with/angry at the other partner about something and simply wants to unload it on the other person, so that one can become fully conscious of the content, one may ask for permission to do a "legal dump." If the other person is open to receiving the dump, one may then go ahead and "blow it all out" at one's partner. It is often best for the partner receiving the dump to be sitting down in a chair, being as open and vulnerable as possible, with the "dumping" partner standing over him/her, and just letting it all fly, totally uncensored. It is advisable to follow the dump with another tool that will help the "dumper" access where the anger was really coming from in him/herself.

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