

This information is based on the book “The New Rules of Marriage” by Terrance Real. The book is challenging but has some very good ideas and concepts. There are some leaps and gaps that make following the material seem less effective. Also, it is written, I think, more for women – even though the author is a man. It is a heavy-duty book for couples with serious challenges in their marriage. From my view, this is not a ‘self help’ book but more of a guide and workbook for couples with a therapist. It is sort of a triple black belt sort of thing.

A fundamental aspect of the book is that most couples have a 20<sup>th</sup> century view of marriage (the male breadwinner and the female homemaker/mother). The author’s view is that people want a 21<sup>st</sup> marriage (more partnership with lifelong passion) and are trying to get that with 20<sup>th</sup> century skills/views. My view is that the author, for the most part, views that the male partner is often the source of the issues. I can see where that is not uncommon, but it came across in a way, which I thought might make the book less effective in getting the male partner to be open to the material. The book also includes a variety of narratives of couples with problems. Although illustrative, I found them depressing and over-long.

## **Are you getting what you want?**

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The basic author’s basic thread of thought is:

- The 20<sup>th</sup> century relationship is about stability, building a life together, and companionship.
- The 21<sup>st</sup> century relationship is about lifelong romance, deep connection, excitement together, and great intimacy.
- 20<sup>th</sup> century relationship strategies for women were primarily submissive.
- 21<sup>st</sup> century relationship strategies for women are ‘liberated’.
- Neither one is really successful.

The proposed approach is ‘relationship empowerment’. Essentially (from the woman’s perspective):

- I was weak.
- Now I’m strong.
- I’m going to bring my full self into the relationship.
- I’m going to stand toe to toe with you and insist on healthy intimacy because I love you.
- We both deserve this.

This leads to the basic rule of “what can I give you to help you give me what I want?” Some of the key questions you’ve got to ask yourself are:

- How are we going to be together in a way that works for both of us?
- How are we going to negotiate our needs?
- When there is conflict or hurt, how are we going to move back into loving connections?

This leads the partners to verbalize:

- This is what I’d like.
- Tell me what you’d like.
- Tell me what you need from me to help you deliver.

Moving into this ‘relationship empowerment’ leads to the rule of “intimacy occurs when mature individuals choose to share themselves with one another.”

## Intimacy

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The book is, as I said, is sort of a workbook. One of the first things is to do an exercise on an intimacy inventory (but there is also a feelings and dream log suggested as well). So how are you doing on intimacy sharing in the areas of:

- Intellectual: sharing of ideas in a respectful, non-judgmental way.
- Emotional: Expression of your fears, joys, sadness, anger, etc. and the receiving of the other person's with respect and compassion.
- Physical: active participation in mutual activities where the couple supports each other.
- Sexual: being open to each other's desires and expressing them without doing anything that the other does not want to do.
- Spiritual: sharing a spiritual life however you might define it and support each other in those pursuits.

The point of this section is to think about and identify your relationship wants and needs.

## Losing Strategies

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People don't get what they want, often, because they are using or keep coming back to losing strategies:

- Needing to be right. (Objective reality has no place in close personal relationships.)
- Controlling your partner. (People are often drawn to partners whose issues fit with our own and lead us to old familiar struggles that we grew up with. A good relationship is one where the tough parts are not avoided, but are handled. Great ones are where they are healed.)
- Unbridled self-expression. (Venting.)
- Retaliation.
- Withdrawal. (Note that the difference between acceptance and withdrawal is resentment.)

Dealing with the problems and issues:

- Couples don't have problems. Couples ARE the problems.
- Relationships don't improve when the stressful issue goes away. Issues go away when the basic relationships improve. You've got to change your usual approach.
- We tend to repeat the losing strategies we experience as kids.
- When the immature parts of your personality get triggered you go back to what you learned/experienced. The trick is to recognize and love that inner child and get their hands off the emotional steering wheel.

To resolve the repetitive fights or troubles, the couple has to deal with the their negative worst fantasies of their partner – their Core Negative Image (CNI). The process is to:

- Make each other's CNI explicit. (Think about and talk about yours and your partner's CNI.)
- Acknowledge the truth in each other's CNI. (Discuss and understand where it came from.)
- Identify CNI-busting behaviors. (These can be acts of kindness, but don't do the acts in a way that exhibits your partner's CNI of you.)
- Use CNIs as your compass. (When you behave in your partner's CNI of you, you will probably trigger upset.)
- Set up dead-stop contracts. (Set up and follow an agreement that whenever one partner says so, the other stops their behavior, whether they agree with the perception or not.)

In order to work toward a great relationship you have to have a safe place in which to do the work. The author talks about the need to deal with any substance or psychiatric issues first. Even if you and your partner don't have these, per se, couples often have misery stabilizers, which are basically forms of withdrawal:

- Alcohol or drugs
- Workaholic
- Love (not sex) dependence (outside of the relationship)
- Sex (porn, one night stands, physical and emotional)
- Food
- Gambling
- Risk taking
- Spending
- TV, Computer
- Children
- Exercise
- Busyness

## **Boundaries and Self Esteem**

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Couples need to have good boundaries. Psychology boundaries are like your skin – they protect and contain. As good as opening up and removing boundaries, it isn't necessarily good. You need to have a good boundary to protect yourself from external attack. But just as much, you need good boundaries to contain some of the 'stuff' from leaking out. Developing the containing part is necessary for closeness because without it, you can behave inappropriately or offensively. Developing the protecting part is necessary for closeness because it allows you to be connected and protected at the same time.

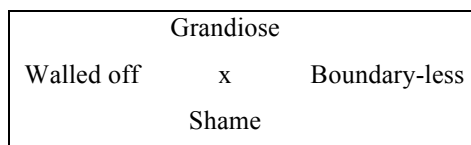
Boundaries are a balance... With no boundaries, you are connected but not protected. With walls (heavy boundaries), you are protected but not connected. Neither leads a couple to intimacy. The boundaries need to be there but also need to be consciously permeable.

Also, you need to love yourself before you can love someone else. This self-love is really self-esteem. You need to recognize your worth in spite of flaws or weakness. Your value isn't earned or conditional. And your worth is not more or less than anybody else.

However, rather than having healthy self-regard, people often go over or under the top on self-esteem. There are 3 types of societal unhealthy self-regard:

- Performance-based (I have worth or don't because of what I can do or what I don't do.)
- Other-based (I have worth or don't because you think I do or you think I don't.)
- Attribute-based (I have worth or don't because of what I have or what I don't have.)

Too much self-regard leads to being grandiose. Having too little leads to being shameful. Coupling self-regard with boundaries gives you a model for relationships:



The goal is to stay in or near the center. An interesting point the author makes is that unhealthy self-esteem is often driven by the American dream – we have to contribute more and/or have more to have self-esteem.

## **Get What You Want and Give What You Can**

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Just as there losing strategies, there are winning strategies:

- Shifting from complaint to request. (Criticizing rarely engenders an attitude of increased generosity. Don't complain about things, but rather ask. You don't have any right to complain about not getting what you haven't asked for.)
- Speaking out with love and savvy. (Remember your love for one another.)
- Responding with generosity
- Empowering each other
- Cherishing

Before you speak in using these strategies, check your goal. If your goal is unconstructive (i.e. one of the losing strategies), step back and question it. If your goal is constructive and it's clear that what you're about to say won't help you achieve it, don't say it!

A tool that the author showed to make discussions go easier is the feedback wheel:

- Ask your partner if they are willing to listen.
- Remember that your motivation is that you love them.
- Tell your partner what you saw/heard.
- Tell your partner what you have made up about it. (What you 'thought' was going on.)
- Tell your partner how you feel about it.
- Tell your partner what you would like to have happen in the future.
- Let go of the outcome.

The author makes the point that a paradox of intimacy is that in order to have a healthy relationship you have to be willing to risk it.

To help relationships, it helps for one of the couple to ask 'what can I give you to help you give me what I'm asking for?'. In these situations, when one person asks for help, remember that this is not a dialogue – it is unilateral. The listener (receiver of the request) must put his or her own needs aside.

Things to remember about listening:

- No one is irrational to himself or herself.
- Emotions follow cognition. The way you perceive an event will determine how you feel about it.
- Remove the phrase 'made me' from your vocabulary. (It is always a choice.)
- Understanding builds empathy, empathy builds compassion, and compassion ends combat.
- Partners rarely engage in combat with each other... They combat each other's CNI's.
- When listening with a generous heart, points of contention become points of curiosity.

Failure to take pleasure in the good things in your life dishonors the gifts or accomplishments that deserve appreciation. It also dishonors your right to be happy.

You cannot sustain the intimacy you enjoyed in the early stage of your relationship unless you are willing to cherish each other in some of the ways that you did at that time. You will not feel like lovers unless you are willing to behave like lovers. Some of the ways to achieve this are:

- Reclaim romantic space.
- Tell the truth.
- Cultivate sharing. (Intellectually, emotionally, physically, sexually, spiritually.)
- Cherish your partner. (When in doubt, be nice to your partner. Appreciate each other at least once a day.)
- Become partners in your relationship health.

