

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work. John M. Gottman and Nan Silver - summary

Gottman, John; Silver, Nan (1999). *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. Crown Publishers imprint (Three Rivers Press).

Chapter 1 – inside the Seattle Love Lab: the truth about happy marriages

This chapter speaks of how John Gottman (et al) made a “Love Lab” where they studied couples (recorded, physiologically monitored, etc.). The authors devised a 91% successful way of predicting divorce – which can be observed with a 5 minute observation! As mentioned, those predictions are based on empirical studies. Gottman claims that often, couples therapy will not work long term because often, the essential ingredients are not tapped into. In *emotionally intelligent marriages*, a dynamic is established where negative thoughts and feelings are kept from overwhelming the positive ones.

Stats:

Over 40 year period, 67% of first marriages will break up. Half of divorces occur within the first 7 years. People who stay married live 4 years longer. Bad marriages lead to physiological and psychological stresses, and thus consequences (i.e. increase in: high blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety, depression, suicide, violence, psychosis, homicide, substance abuse). Immune system gets depressed because in divorcees. Heightened marital stress also has an effect on the children’s physiology and their behaviours. A peaceful divorce is better than an hostile marriage.

Self-reports are seen by Gottman as erroneous. i.e. abused women will indicate that they are happy. But when interviewed one-on-one, in a setting which they feel safe, their agony is revealed.

Gottman tries to follow up with his research couples in the long-term.

Gottman claims that working on communication and/or conflict resolution does not lead to happier marriages. The commonly advised “I” statements, “active listening”, validation and empathy may be helpful, but it is not necessarily the decisive factor in a couple’s relationship’s improvement. Conflict resolution is not the decisive factor as happily married couples may have a lot of conflict, and may not validate when angry at each other. It is the positive sentiments overriding the negative ones.

Myths

1. ***neurosis or personality problems ruin marriage:*** not true: we all have quirks! It is how you deal with them.
2. ***common interests keep people together:*** it may or may not be true – but it is all in the “how” you do things together.
3. ***reciprocity keeps a good relationship:*** WRONG!!!! It is reciprocity – i.e. keeping a tab on things – which is BAD for the relationship. Instead: the happy couples just do thing because they feel happy about the relationship.
4. ***Avoiding conflict will ruin your marriage:*** saying tough things “as is” and not saying those tough things (i.e. “putting things under the rug”) are polar positions, and both not necessarily good or bad. It is whether both partners are satisfied with the pervasive approach.
5. ***Affairs are the root causes of divorce:*** not true! Affairs happen because there is a problem in the relationship. The relational problems which send people into divorce also send people into

affairs. Affairs are usually about sex. 20-27% of surveyed divorcees said that an affair was even partially to blame for the divorce.

6. **Men are not biologically built for marriage:** it is more complex: the statistics show that the more that women enter the workforce, the more they have affairs to the equal extent to men.
7. **Men and women are from different planets:** i.e. “men are from Mars and women are from Venus” – is the famous phrase. Gender differences may contribute to marriage difficulties, but do not cause them. There are underlying common factors which both genders want from a relationship: 70% of both men and women said that friendship is the key to satisfying relationship, and much is affected by it (i.e. sex, romance, passion).

What does make marriages work?

Marriages are based on deep friendship - i.e. knowing each other's likes, dislikes, quirks, hopes and dreams. The main affective vectors (positive or negative “*sentiment override*”) –is the pervasive affect of the relationship. Those who have a *positive sentiment override* can live better with negative things in the relationship because the relationship is balanced towards the positive. Those in relational *negative sentiment override*. Things which happen get interpreted with the hue of the vector of the sentiment override. In *positive sentiment override*: things are more seen within a positive light whereas in *negative sentiment override*, things are seen increasingly negative. For example, in *positive sentiment overrides*, there are attempts to repair tensions. Each couple has a “set-point” for positivity and/or negativity, and the couple therapy may have to work at moving the set point to a more positive valence. Some marriages start with a high positive set-point, but they do not know how to maintain it, and thus resentment, etc. kicks in (negative sentiment override). Keeping the positive sentiment override in a marriage may be done through Gottman's seven principles.

Happily married couples do not have less conflict/tensions, but they are better able to repair it before it gets out of hand (before negative sentiment overrides the positive ones).

In the strongest marriages, the partners have a common *sense of meaning*. This means they support each other's aspiration.

Bad news: most marital arguments cannot be resolved. Many couples try to change each others' minds with futility. People are different, and you have to learn to live happily with it in some way or another.

Following the *seven principles* will help the couple beyond the unhelpful conflict-resolution advice they may have gotten or have to offer themselves.

Chapter 2 – how I predict divorce

When the studies couples were in Gottman's ‘Love Lab’, he asked them to argue and resolve a conflict. Findings show that it is not if they argue but how they argue that makes the difference in the relationship. Four signs of possible relational problems/divorce:

1. **Harsh startup** - i.e. how discussions (especially emotion-laden topics) are started. Harsh startup are those conversation start-ups laden with criticism and sarcasm - which are forms of contempt.
2. **Four horsemen of the apocalypse:** they are toxic to a relationship
 - a. **Criticism** – instead of a specific complaint (about a given action or situation): better to *complain* about the action as opposed to criticize the person for who the person is. Saying: “what's wrong with you” is a great way to build your divorce.

- b. **Contempt:** sarcasm and cynicism are examples of contempt and do wonders towards your divorce! It is even bad for your immune system! Contempt can be seen in things like rolling eyes, sneering, mockery and hostile humor. Contempt is the most poisonous to a relationship than any other “horsemen”. Sometimes, contempt is offered in the guise of high “moral” standards. Contempt also affects the couple’s immune system. Belligerence is similar to contempt. Contempt is fueled by long-standing negative thoughts.
 - c. **Defensiveness:** explaining/defending oneself in light of attack actually does not have the desired effect, as it tends to have an underlying blaming counter-attack, such as in: “it’s not me, it is actually you”.
 - d. **Stonewalling:** one of the partners eventually tunes out, after the aforementioned issues - because s/he is overwhelmed. No non-verbal cues of listening are given. It gives a message of “I do not care”. In 85% of cases, the stonewall-er is the husband, usually for evolutionary reasons, as the man’s physiological stress systems are more reactive and take longer to calm down, while women can soothe themselves calm faster. Women can physiologically calm down faster, and men’s physiology will more likely than women only calm itself down independently, after retaliatory action.
3. **Flooding:** people stonewall to protect against flooding response to harsh startups or the Four Horsemen. Flooding is the defenseless, shell-shocked feeling after the barrage of criticisms, contempt or defensiveness. People in such states become hyper-vigilant that spouse is “just about to blow at me again”. This state of mind, only reflexive responses could be expected due to the physiological “fight-or-flight” state of the flooded partner. Only if the above factors are a routine occurrence is the marriage in dire straits. The occasional flooding can be tolerated by a stable relationship.
 4. **Body language:** physiological changes during flooding (i.e. endocrine, heart-rate) can predict divorce for two reasons: 1) distress when dealing with the other; 2) hard to have a productive problem-solving discussion when distressed.
 5. **Failed repair attempts:** emotional repairs lower stress levels and conflict. But if the repair attempts not work to avoid the flooding stage of conflict, then the couple is likely going to have relational difficulties. i.e. when the *four horsemen* rule the pattern of the couple’s communication, then repair attempts are often not even noticed. Feedback loop: the more “four horsemen”, the more flooding, and then repair attempts are not noticed, until eventually the partner withdraws. Positive sentiment override predicts the success of repair attempts. *Four horsemen* predict divorce by 82%. Add in the failed-repair attempts, and prediction percentage runs in the 90s. On the other hand, having the *four horsemen*, but with successful *repair attempts*, a stable relationship is likely. But when *four horsemen moved in for good*, repair attempts are incredibly hard to attempt, accept or even notice.
 6. **Bad memories:** when past is re-written in a negative hue, divorce chances royally go up! i.e. do you gain strength or negativity from the adversity that you weathered together. How people frame the situation could lead to further negativity or positivity or reasonability, etc.... When the couple has negatively re-written their relationship, they are at the end stage of their marriage. They could talk calmly (i.e. distantly!!!!) about their conflict. They may appear like they are doing relatively well. This calm is not to say that their conflicts were superficial, but that the couple has emotionally divorced! But such relationships could be salvaged too, i.e. not only by the communication (i.e. startups, horsemen issues) and effective repairing, but also by increasing friendship -i.e. improving things too when the couple is not fighting.

Final 4 stages that signal divorce:

1. you see your marital problems as severe
2. talking things over seems useless – you solve problems on your own
3. you start leading parallel lives

4. loneliness sets in.

Gottman: couple therapy is not about negotiating skills or conflict resolution. Such approaches do not work!!!! It is also about what people do right when they do not argue: i.e. therefore work on increasing the friendship!!!! And that is where Gottman 7 Principles enter!!!!

Chapter 3

Principle 1: enhance your love maps

The more you are familiar with your partner, the more intimacy happens. This is called having a *love map* of your partner. This helps maintain intimacy, and better prepares one to deal with stressful events and conflict. Life-cycle transitions (=inherent stressors), such as bringing in children into the family, are also better handled as the couple are “in touch”. Those who do not have an adequate love map experience a drop in intimacy in the couple relationship with transition to parenthood.

Tools to improve love maps

1. **love map questionnaire:** self-assessment to see how much the person really knows his/her partner.
2. **Exercises in this book:**
 - a. ‘love-map 20 question game’ -asking the partner to think of the things important to the asking partner.
 - b. ‘make your own love maps’: filling in info about partner’s:
 - i. People of partner’s life -(friends, potential friends, rivals/enemies)
 - ii. Recent important events in partner’s life
 - iii. Upcoming events
 - iv. Partner’s current stresses
 - v. Partner’s current stresses, worries
 - vi. Partner’s hopes, aspirations
 - c. ‘who am I’ - self-exploration exercise to allow you and your partner to build better love maps. This exercise looks at:
 - i. My triumphs and strivings
 - ii. My injuries and healing
 - iii. My emotional world
 - iv. My mission and legacy
 - v. Who I want to become

Chapter 4

Principle 2: nurture your fondness and admiration

-work to increase/recall/unearth positive emotions about each other. The ‘fondness’ and ‘admiration’ aspects of couple relatedness are the antidote to *contempt* - it is a buffer to stressors due to a fundamentally positive view of each other. If current relational situation seems negative, the therapist may want to look to the past for positive times/basis. *Fondness and admiration* prevents the ‘*four horsemen*’. Without *Fondness and admiration*, the relationship has little if any basis. Increasing discussions (acknowledging and open discussion) of the positives of the partner will help the fondness and admiration.

Tools to improve *fondness and admiration*

3. ***fondness and admiration questionnaire***: self-assessment to delineate the current state of *fondness and admiration*
4. **Exercises in this book:**
 - a. *'I appreciate...'* - listing things that one appreciates about the partner + Ground it in an incident - then share it with your partner.
 - b. *'the history and philosophy of your marriage'*- i.e. to highlight the positive history and the love/great expectations which brought the couple together.;
 - c. *'Seven Week Course in Fondness and Admiration'* - this exercise schedules a daily rehearsing of positive thoughts and a related tasks which positively

Chapter 5

Principle 3: turn towards each other and not away

This principle is based on the idea of staying connected, and positively so. Turning towards each other in small interactions builds romance and connection beyond the cushioning of stresses - it is the small and regular interactions of turning towards each other. It adds to the “emotional bank account” and allows for greater leeway during conflict.

Exercises for this principle:

- a. *“is your marriage primed for romance?”* – self-assessment to see the levels of romance/turning towards the partner
- b. ***The emotional bank account***: keeping track of what **you** did to improve your connectedness, and subtract things you did not do (not to be done in a tit-for-tat way!). A discussion between the partners can take place as to which tasks will help better the couple’s connectedness. A list of potential connectedness-oriented tasks is offered in this exercise.
- c. ***The stress reducing conversation***: i.e. to ensure that other stressors do not spill over to the relationship. Active listening is done here, and only if you are not the target of the stress. The conversation is supposed to increase calm and not conflict. Scenarios are given in this exercise to practice for the couple’s real life situations. Elements of *stress reducing conversations* include:
 - a. *Take turns*
 - b. *No unsolicited advice*
 - c. *Show genuine interest*
 - d. *Communicate your understanding*
 - e. *Take your spouse’s side*
 - f. *Take the ‘we against others’ attitude*
 - g. *Express affection*
 - h. *Validate emotions*
- d. ***what to do when your spouse does not turn to you***: when one is feeling rebuffed by the other, questionnaire is filled out by both, as a basis for discussion. Questions include: what did you feel? What triggered it? Those recent feelings about marriage came from? What was my contribution to it? What can I do to make it better? One thing which my partner can do differently? Step 2 is to discuss where those feelings came from: “these recent feelings about my marriage came from (i.e. a previous relationship, the way I was treated in my family growing up, my basic fears and insecurities, unresolved things, unrealized hopes, old nightmares, etc). It is easy forget that the above things are not “hard facts” but rather subjective things. So too, it is easy to assume that distance/loneliness is your partner’s fault. One can only do this exercise once calmed/soothed (see exercise on p. 176). Then turn to the

exercise of identifying your own state (p. 96: questions include: I have been depressed, stressed and irritable, not expressed enough appreciation to my spouse, not been affectionate enough, feeling like a martyr, etc...), and then answer the questions of : “overall, my contribution to this mess was:..., how can I make it better?.... what one thing could make my partner do next time to avoid this problem?”

Those exercises will not forestall every argument, but will foster turning towards each other, and thus a deeper friendship, therefore shielding against conflict.

Chapter 6

Principle 4: let your partner influence you

-meant for a partner who is unwilling to share power/influence in the relationship. More of a male thing, but females can also fault with this principle. 81% of couples where the men do not do this – will self-destruct. Women tend to match or reduce negativity. Men tend to escalate it, usually with one of the *four horsemen* (criticism, contempt, defensiveness or stonewalling) even if this does not happen every time, it does lead to the 81% self-destructive couples, as it obliterated the other’s opinion, instead of taking it into account. 65% of men did not automatically search for the partner’s underlying position, and escalated instead of de-escalated the negativity. The point is still to show honor and respect to the spouse [regardless of the culture/beliefs at hand]. Some men show latent resistance to have their spouses influence them. The point of this principle: don’t argue back to statements which are: harshly phrased, conflicting with one’s own agenda, or are inconvenient requests – rather, accommodate to them. The issue is not to express or not express negative emotions, but it is how one would accommodate to them. Accepting influence of wife reduces her harshness. Strong foundation of compromise leads to easier-found solutions. Accepting influence will make it easier for the husband to establish deeper love-maps, increase fondness and admiration, and to turn towards each other. Women tend to be more naturally oriented to relationships/emotions, whereas men tend to be more action oriented. Therefore, men have to make an added effort to learn about emotions and emotional/relational elements of the situation, even as benign as going shopping for home stuff and getting excited about patterns on the dishes in the store. Gottman (who is a male) called it “emotional intelligence”. Learning to yield is an important lesson in life: There are people who will regularly run into obstacles and others who will usually drive around them. The latter are the happier people in life. Women tend more often to bring up the sticky issues, while men tend to a first avoid them. Perpetual problems are better identified when the core issues behind the conflict situation are identified and delineated. Working with the delineation of the underlying issues helps the couple not escalate by identifying the real situation and thus they are better equipped to more truly turn to each other. If acceding power/influence in the relationship is difficult for one, s/he is best to acknowledge this disposition so that both partners can work at this issue in a way which is upfront, yet also comfortable for both.

Exercises:

1. ***accepting influence questionnaire*** – true or false questions which assess how much a person is accepting his (or her) spouse’s influence;
2. ***exercise 1: ‘yield to win’***-common conflict situations are given to the couple – i.e. understanding the request behind the apparent negativity, and intensity the emphasis on how important the issue is for the partner.
3. ***exercise 2: The Gottman Island Survival Game:*** see if you can coordinate a hypothetical “survival list” for a deserted island stay. Then, see how you and the other responded to influencing each other.

Chapter 7 – the two kinds of marital conflict:

There are two kinds of marital conflict: solvable and unsolvable. Therefore, one must customize the coping mechanism to whether the conflict is at hand is solvable or not. 69% of conflicts fall into the '*perpetual problem*' category. Perpetual problems are underlying assumptions and issues which cannot be grounded and fixed situationally. Resolving major marital conflicts is not the essential component to happy marriages, many happy couples have not resolve their big issues. Since the perpetual issues are perpetual by definition, one must chose a partner whose differences you can live and cope with [i.e. strategies and routines to deal with unbridgeable differences). Otherwise, the perpetual problems become obstacles, as instead of coping with the differences in the couple, the couple gets into a *gridlock* situation. With the gridlock, the *four horsemen* become more present, while humor and affection is on the decrease, and the couple begin living in parallel lives [read: the decline and death of the relationship]. Signs of *gridlock* include:

1. conflict makes you feel rejected by your partner;
2. you keep on talking about it, but make no headways;
3. you become entrenched in your positions and are unwilling to budge;
4. when you discuss the topic, you feel more frustrated and hurt;
5. your conversations about the problem are devoid of humor, amusement or affection;
6. you become more unbudgeable over time, leading to mutual vilification during these conversations;
7. the vilification leads to being further rooted in your position and polarized, more extreme in your views and less willing to compromise;
8. eventually, you disengage from each other emotionally.

-gridlocks happen as the couple's entrenchment at an unsolvable problem allows conflict to influence more areas of their lives.

Solvable problems: no underlying issues in the solvable dilemmas. They are **situational!** They are less gut-wrenching, and are less intense than the perpetual problems. Many couples, manuals and therapists do not know how to solve them either, as offered techniques are hard to implement and/or master. Validation is not enough, especially as it is hard to apply when distressed. Principle 5 will go into further detail about this. But the gist is:

1. soft and not harsh start-up;
2. effective use of repair attempts;
3. monitor your physiology during discussions for warning signs of flooding;
4. learn how to compromise;
5. become more tolerant of each other's imperfections.

Solvable problems, if not addressed or coped with, can lead to perpetual problems due to resentment kicking in, and thus entrenchment in their positions. If the conflict is about the entrenched resentment due to a situational/solvable issue, then it may be in the realm of perpetual/unsolvable conflict.

Gottman would give examples and ask the couple at hand to distinguish between perpetual and solvable issues.

Exercises:

1. **assessing your marital conflicts questionnaire** – asks about various marital issues, whether they are perpetual or solvable, and how the partners each enter to and deal with the conflict. Solvable issues are discussed in chapter 8. Perpetual issues are discussed in chapter 10.
2. **Exercise 1: ‘your last argument’**: answering the questions [and then the couple comparing their answers]:
 - a. During this argument, I felt like _____ [list given]
 - b. What triggered these feelings? _____ [list given]
 - c. The recent argument was rooted in _____ [list given].
 - d. After self-soothing [discussed next chapter], discuss one’s own stress-maintaining thoughts/actions [list given] – the point is to make the partner’s realize that it is not a unilateral situation where everything is merely the other’s fault, but at least circular if not more complex.
 - e. My contribution to this mess was _____
 - f. How can I make it better next time?
 - g. What one thing can my partner do next time to avoid this argument?

-if this exercise does not work, do ‘fondness and admiration’ exercises first – [chapter 4]. The point of this chapter is to accept the quirks and oddities of the partner that will not likely change, let alone because a messy or chronic argument. The key to all conflict resolution is basic acceptance of the partner’s personality. Finding conciliatory comments within arguments are also important, when you know how to identify them. They are often more present than a partner may have realized – and could be discovered once one knows what to listen for. A judgmental/critical comment or even general great piece of advice will not be accepted before one feels fundamentally understood, liked and accepted. Just like in child development, acknowledging the other’s hard emotions as well builds self-image and effective social skills.

-forgiving past faults of your partner is also important – grudges/bitterness at the spouse may wear at the relationship. Fondness and admiration must account for each partner’s imperfections!

Chapter 8: Principle 5: solve your solvable problems

If a given disagreement is deemed solvable, then a couple has to try something different than unresolved arguments, screaming, yelling or angry silences. The classical advice of improving communication or suggestions of “try to put yourself in the others’ shoes” does not work, because some people cannot. Nevertheless, those are not the essential components of happy and loving marriages. Instead, 5 principle of problem resolution were found to key to happy marriages:

1. **Soften your startup**- arguments tend to end up in the same tonality that they start! Also, couples tend to divorce more because of distancing to avoid the fights than the actual fights. Women tend to be the ones with more harsh start-ups as they tend to be the ones who try to bring up and resolve issues, while men tend to avoid the arguments as their body reacts stronger than women to stress. Therefore, it is important to phrase the way you start your disagreement in a soft way. i.e. instead of saying “what’s wrong with you? You never take the garbage out!”, you can say “I am sometimes so tired when I get home from work, can you please help me with the garbage?”. There is a questionnaire on page 162 in Gottman’s book which tries to assess whether harsh startups is an issue for a couple. This questionnaire based on how the partner hears the requests of the other partner. *Exercise 1: soften startup*: gives a harsh startup and the person is supposed to give a softer alternative. Suggestions on how to have soft-startups:
 - a. Complain – but don’t blame

- b. Make statements which start with “I” instead of “you” – i.e. speak of what the situation does to you, not what the other does. i.e. “you are reckless with money” sounds worse and more blaming than “I would like to save more”. “I think you are a bitch” does not count, as the sentence starts with an “I” but defeats the purpose of getting to the underlying point in a palpable way.
 - c. Describe what is happening, do not judge or evaluate
 - d. Be clear – your partner is not a mind-reader – i.e. “please change the baby’s bottle and diaper” instead of “would you care for the baby for once”.
 - e. Be appreciative- i.e. ground request in previously successful/correct action of the partner.
 - f. Don’t store things [negative emotions] up! – it will escalate in your mind.
2. **Learn to make and receive repair attempts:** good for when noticing that the discussion will end up the wrong way. The essence is that the repair attempts gets through to the other partner – not that the repair attempt is “elegant” *repair attempts questionnaire*: on page 170 – tries to assess the effectiveness of repair attempts in your own relationship. Repair attempts could be missed if not sugarcoated. One should focus on “brake” attempts at the negativity-escalating situation. Humor is helpful as well as “announcing an upcoming repair attempt. Identifying potent repair statements is like megaphones to the repair attempts. Repair statements could be:
- a. I feel:
 - i. I am getting scared
 - ii. Please say that more gently
 - iii. Did I do something wrong?
 - iv. That hurt my feelings
 - v. I am feeling sad
 - vi. That felt like an insult
 - vii. I am feeling defensive– can you rephrase that?
 - viii. I feel criticized – can you rephrase that?
 - ix. Etc.
 - b. I need to calm down
 - i. Can you make things safer for me?
 - ii. I need things to be calmer right now
 - iii. Tell me you love me\can I take that back?
 - iv. I need your support
 - v. Just try to listen to me and try to understand
 - vi. Please be gentler with me
 - vii. Please help me calm down
 - viii. This is important to me, please listen
 - ix. Can we take a break
 - x. I am starting to feel flooded
 - xi. I need to finish what I was saying
 - xii. Etc.
 - c. Sorry
 - i. My reaction was too extreme. Sorry.
 - ii. I really blew that one
 - iii. Let me try again
 - iv. I want to be gentler to you right now but do not know how.
 - v. Tell me what you hear me saying
 - vi. I can see my part in all of this
 - vii. How can I make things better
 - viii. Let me try this over again
 - ix. What you are saying is....
 - x. Let me try again in a softer way
 - xi. I am sorry. Please forgive me
 - d. Get to

- i. You are starting to convince me
 - ii. I agree with part of what you are saying
 - iii. Let's compromise here
 - iv. Let's find our common ground
 - v. The problem is not very serious in the big picture
 - vi. Lets agree to include both of our view in a solution
 - vii. I think your point of view makes sense
 - viii. I never thought of it this way
 - ix. I see what you are talking about
 - x. One thing I admire you about is:
 - xi. I am thankful for...
- e. Stop action
- i. I might be wrong here
 - ii. Please, let's stop for a while
 - iii. Let's take a break
 - iv. Give me a moment here. I'll be back
 - v. Please stop.
 - vi. I feel flooded
 - vii. Let's start over again
 - viii. Hang in there –don't withdraw
- f. I appreciate
- i. I know it is not your fault
 - ii. My part of the problem is
 - iii. I see your point
 - iv. Thank you for
 - v. I am thankful for
 - vi. That's a good point
 - vii. We're both saying
 - viii. I understand
 - ix. I love you
 - x. One thing I admire about you is
 - xi. This is not your problem – it is *our* problem
3. ***Soothe yourself and each other*** –some couples can self-soothe as part of a discussion. Others cannot as they flood fast, and thus repair attempts are missed. A flooding questionnaire is offered on page 177. Self-soothing exercise is found on page 178. i.e. take some time to unwind after a workday or within a couple conflict –i.e. calming activities, such as lying down, slow breathing, yoga, etc... when a person is flooded, discussion has to stop, before he stonewalls! When a person's heart-rate reaches 100bpm, he'll be unable to hear anything the other says – give him a break then (i.e. 20 minutes)! Taking a break in a fight will help the people calm down enough to now withdraw completely. Exercise on soothing each other is found on p. 180: i.e. reverse the conditioning of seeing the partner as a source of flooding agency. To this end, the couple need to first discuss:
- a. *What floods each person*
 - b. *How issues or irritability are brought up*
 - c. *Does anyone store up things*
 - d. *Is there anything I can do to soothe you*
 - e. *Is there anything that you can do to soothe me*
 - f. *What signals can we use to let other know that we're flooded? Can we take a break?*
4. ***Compromise:*** negotiation is nice. But it only works if there is a softening startup, repairing your discussion and staying calm (the above three steps). Also, one cannot be closed to, or disagree with everything that the spouse says. Men tend to have a harder time accepting influence of their partners than vice-versa. Exercise (182) finding common grounds (i.e. making circle inside another one – putting non-negotiable things inside, and negotiable things outside, and then starting to negotiate using this info. Exercise (p.184) make a paper tower

together –but work on agreeing to each others’ plans and ideas). In the first exercise, the the couple must ask:

- a. What do we agree about
- b. What are our common feelings or the most important feelings here
- c. What common goal scan we have here
- d. How do we think that these goals should be accomplished.

5. ***Be tolerant of each others’ faults*** - you cannot change your partner. If if you think so, then compromise cannot happen!

Chapter 9: Coping with typical solvable problems

There are some “hot topics” of contention in each marriage, and one must remember to go beyond “lip service” to the notion that a marriage takes “work”. Once the issue at hand is indeed deemed to be a solvable issue, one must actually get to effective coping with it. Six common marital stressors and possible coping solutions are discussed in this chapter:

Stress and more stress:

Task: making the marriage a place of peace.

Issues include: i.e. bringing stress home from work. i.e. wife gets angry at husband for not doing groceries, so she is left without food after a long and crappy day at work, or comes home in a negative mood, it is likely not personal, and must not be taken as such. *Solutions include:* regular discussion sessions to speak of what has to be done, creating a break between work and home, and in that time, so some soothing/calming activities (i.e. as outlined in chapter 8), and regular whining sessions where each can complain about any catastrophes while the other is supportive.

Relations with the in-laws

Task: establishing a sense of “we-ness” or solidarity between husband and wife.

Issues include: a person may be placed in a loyalty conflict between a family-of-origin member (i.e. parent) and spouse. The spouse and the family of origin member may want to be more, or try to compete with each other. Each side may think that the person does not love them enough because of the other, and thus the competition and the loyalty conflict.

Solution: there is no solution to this except the partner who is being “fought” over establishing the fact that s/he is now an adult and had established his own family, which has nothing to do with more or less loving. Any intrusions into the marriage should thus not be accepted or colluded with, by this person. Family-of-origin may protest at first, but they’ll have to get used to it.

Money, money, money

Task: balancing the freedom and empowerment money represents with the security and trust it also symbolizes.

Issues include: balancing pleasure and security. If disagreements over how money is handled goes beyond the newlywed stages of the marriage, it may be a sign of bad negotiation, new life-cycle stage, or a perpetual (unsolvable) problem, as underlying are the deeply held values of each of the partners.

Solutions: need to budget together, and also be firm on the items which you consider non-negotiable.
Steps include:

1. itemize your current expenditures;
2. manage everyday finances. i.e. compare essentials to your income and assets, in order to manage everyday finances based on your means and essential needs.
3. Come up with a plan of who pays what and how
4. Separate lists and plans for each of the partner to be compared to try to meet both sides' "essential" needs.
5. Plan your financial future (+i.e. look for common ground between the partners in order to proceed).

Sex

The task: fundamental appreciation and acceptance of each other.

Issues include: sex has a huge potential for embarrassment, hurt and rejection. Therefore, couples often try to speak and negotiate with each other about it, but in very vague, indirect, imprecise and inconclusive terms.

Solutions: learn to speak about sex in a safe way. Lovemaking with a critical partner ends up usually being quite short (and sucky). One must remember that his partner's sexual preferences in not a reflection of one's own attractiveness. Learning about the other gender's anatomy helps sex too. One can give room to the partner's fantasies, if the relationship gets that strong, but one can also say no if requested actions are not wanted. More intimate partners had better sex, regardless of the partners' individual personalities.

Housework

The task: creating a sense of fairness and teamwork

Issues include: the more house-orderliness oriented person will feel disrespected and unsupported if the other is oblivious to that person's home-orderliness. Resentment may kick in. sometimes, men do not appreciate [due to socializing] that women do so much of the home chores and may over-estimate their own house-work.

Solution: men are to do more of the house chores. Women tend to more into those kinds of men, and actually sex life improves too. In such cases, women's heart-rates during arguments is lower, and thus less likely to begin an argument harshly. Also, if chores are unevenly balanced (i.e. the man do all the hard work + woman only do the mindless ones), one of the partners is bound to feel resentful. Similar issues can be spoken about when it comes to finances and childrearing. One can do a "who-does-what" list with two boxes beside each chore: now and ideal.

Becoming parents

The task: expanding your sense of "we-ness" to include your children

Issues include: the move from couplehood to parenthood is a difficult one. Marital satisfaction reduces (usually first by the wife, and then the in the husband as a response). Reasons for this reduction in marital satisfaction include lack of sleep, lack of feeling appreciated, added responsibility, juggling motherhood with a job, economic stresses and lack of time for other things. Mothers tend to feel intense affection to the newborn. Husband may develop resentfulness at the wife for not having time for him, her tiredness, and preoccupation with baby. The husband may live his baby, but he wants his wife back.

Solution: husband must accept the new family constellation – this will allow him to accept his new role not only as a husband but also a father. Some people give bad advice: work on your marriage too [i.e. seesaw between marital and parenthood positions, such as spending time away from the newborn]. Instead, what is of essence is not to balance the marriage and parenthood, but rather to transition together and in an integrated way into the new situation. Some tips include:

1. Work on the marital friendship – before babies comes along
2. Don't exclude dad from caring for the baby – mothers sometimes tend to take over or assume a supervisory role, and chastise the father if he does not do things her way. Some men tend to withdraw and let the mother do everything – at the expense of the father later truly feeling and being excluded. Some men may envy the mother-infant bond, and it would be good to have the father also take part in nursing of the child, if not physically, then at least with doing things around the breastfeeding.
3. Let dad be the baby's playmate – even before the baby is able to walk and talk (despite some fathers' having a harder time doing so before the baby is able to walk/talk).
4. Carve out time for both of you (the couple).
5. Be sensitive to the father's needs: i.e. because of the overwhelming parenting needs of young infants, when mothers do much of it, the fathers may intellectually know the reason why the mother is immersed in the child-caring, but will still feel left out. It is important for the wife to acknowledge this, and for him to not withdraw [i.e. into a further sense of exclusion].
6. Give mom a break – husband can change his work schedule or something else that will allow the mother to take her well-deserved breaks, as she has been immersed in child-caring.

Chapter 10: Principle 6: Overcoming Gridlock

-gridlocks happen when people's life dreams [hopes, aspirations, wishes] for their life are not being addressed/respected by each other. Such deep dreams could include:

1. sense of freedom
2. Experience of peace
3. Unity with nature
4. Exploration of who I am
5. Justice
6. Honor
7. Unity with the past
8. Healing
9. Spiritual journal
10. Etc.

When dreams are respected: couples are happier as they realize that marriage is supposed to help them with those dreams – and not manipulate the other out of achieving the goal. The couple who knows

that the marriage is meant to help with each partner's dreams and thus is able to forgo dreams with the knowledge that its aspirations will be acknowledged and considered later.

When dreams are hidden

Hidden dreams are only likely to emerge after the marriage is felt as safe – i.e. first three Gottman principles.

-when you get to expose your dream and it seems as if your dream is in opposition to the other's dreams, tensions seem to escalate at first. But there is a process here:

1. **step one:** become a dream detective: even if someone gives up a dream for the marriage. Such people may minimize it as “childish” or “impractical”, but the dream will resurface in disguised form, as a gridlock conflict (exercise #1, page 225: ‘hidden dreams’: 6 examples of gridlocks where person is supposed to find the underlying dream.
2. **Step two:** work on a gridlocked issue. This means spelling them out and where the dreams come from. Do not argue or criticize the other's dreams – just try to understand why you and he feels this way. Speaker's job is to describe your position and what it means to you (I statements and soft startups help here!). The listener's job is to hear the other person's dream and encourage its exploration, suspending rebuttals and judgment. You want to honor your partner's dreams, not triumph them and crush your partner. Three levels of partaking in the other's dream:
 - a. **Listening**
 - b. **Financial support**
 - c. **Taking part**
3. **Step 3:** *soothe each other* – dreams in opposition could be stressful – take a break for soothing, as flooding will achieve nothing.
4. **Step 4:** *end the gridlock* – you will never be able to fully resolve it but reduce some of its tensions – i.e. ‘finding common ground’ exercise (p. 182) – i.e. finding things that you can compromise on while others which you cannot compromise on. Try to make the second category smaller than the first one. Delineate the core issues (and explain to the partner the meaning which the ‘core’, non-negotiable ones have for you), delineate the areas of flexibility, and then arrive at temporary compromises. The conflict will still be ongoing (i.e. differences of positions), but not as gridlocked.
5. **Step 5:** *say thank you*. May be difficult to do after a gridlock discussion, but is important to highlight and thank the positives in the relationship as well!

Chapter 11: Principle 7: Creating shared meaning

-one can have a happy marriage, but some people look for a spiritual connection – finding meaning in the togetherness beyond the mere joint tasks of family life. Symbols and rituals are helpful. There is a family “culture” (which may change and the partners develop), which gives shared meaning to their sense of togetherness. There may be dreams that each partner has which cannot work well together with the other partner's dreams. But the “shared meaning” couple looks beyond that: discuss convictions in a way which blends each of the partner's sense of meaning. A discussion of core values can be used to further the couple's shared meaning [perhaps use family legacies to prime such a discussion]. The shared meanings will strengthen the marital friendship [which actually the first three principles try to do]. Shared meaning questionnaire (p.246) – looks at the rituals of connection, roles, goals and symbols meant to stimulate thought about the couple's shared meaning situation. Shared meaning takes years to build.

Family rituals

-not many families have family dinners and those who do, often use the television, thus no conversation could happen. Shared meaning could be created around dinner, but each family could develop their own ritual a “rituals” exercise (page 251) can help the couple work out ritual issues such as on how to eat dinner, holidays, keeping in touch with relatives, special events, rites of passage, lovemaking, community [i.e. friends, caring for others in the community], how to celebrate positive and negative events.

Your roles in life

-i.e. is there congruence between each partner’s role values and views? i.e. if both partners are geologists, but one identified more with the profession and the other firstly identified with her gender. Therefore values have to be discussed beyond superficiality of apparent congruency – in order to work out significant value differences (i.e. around work, parenting, contact with in-laws, friends, community and the balancing of the aforementioned, etc...).

Personal goals

Personal goals are sometimes not delineated clearly to oneself, or to the other partner.

Shared symbols

-i.e. symbols which have shared relational meaning.

Last chapter of the book: Afterword: what’s now?

-don’t worry too much about some missteps, as because you can look up the various elements of the book to get a roadmap back to the intimate relationship.

The Magic Five Hours:

-to spontaneously fix and/or improve their relationships, people would renew their relations in about 5 hours a week with many small things. Gottman called this the *Magic Five Hours*. Activities included:

1. **parting:** before saying goodbyes in the morning, find out one thing which is happening in the partner’s life that day;
2. **reunions:** stress-reducing conversations at the end of each workday
3. **admiration and appreciation:** find some way every day to communicate genuine affection and appreciation towards your spouse
4. **affection:** kiss, hold, grab and touch each other when together
5. **weekly date: could be a relaxing low-pressure way to stay connected.** Ask each other questions [to update your love-maps] and turn towards each other. Talking out a marital issue or working through an argument can also be placed here.

The Marriage Poop Detector:

-the mythic assumptions that marriage expectations are often overblown and lowering expectations of each other will help marriage - was shown to be wrong! People with higher expectations of marriage had the highest quality of marriage. For example, people who expected to not have too much

negativity, contempt, defensiveness, etc... , and insisted on confronting it gently, wound up happiest married. Therefore, the marriage needs an early warning system “Marital Poop Detector”. i.e. when one partner senses something is wrong, they could ask the partner what is going on (not too close to bedtime as it may interfere with sleep). Issues to bring up could include:

1. I have been acting irritable
2. I have been feeling emotionally distant
3. There has been a lot of tensions between us
4. I find myself wanting to be somewhere else
5. I have been feeling lonely
6. My partner has seemed emotionally unavailable
7. I have been angry
8. We have been out of touch with each other
9. My partner has little idea of what I am thinking
10. We have been under a great deal of stress and it has taken its toll on us
11. I wish we were closer right now
12. I have wanted to be alone a lot
13. My partner has been acting irritable
14. My partner has been acting emotionally distant
15. My partner’s attention seems to be somewhere else
16. I have been emotionally unavailable to my partner
17. My partner has been angry
18. I have little idea of what my partner is thinking
19. My partner has wanted to be alone a lot
20. We really need to talk
21. We haven’t communicated very well
22. We have been fighting more than usual
23. Lately, small issues escalate
24. We have been hurting each other’s feelings
25. There hasn’t been much fun or joy in our lives.

Forgive yourself

No such thing as constructive criticism – it does not work. Complaining about something specific may work, but not the critical stance. Two sources of a partner’s critical stance:

1. Feeling chronically ignored – thus both partners need to change (one being more responsive and the other less critical).
2. Self-doubt coming from within [i.e. childhood] – I.e. one who always searches for approval but cannot enjoy it when it is offered. If a person’s mind is trained to find what is wrong, he will miss what is done right by the partner. If you feel you are inadequate, you will look for it in yourself – and in your partner. Instead, learn to forgive yourself for imperfections. Thanking others is not to flatter the others but to ingrain appreciation in ourselves.

Exercise:

1. Identify your critical tendencies
2. Give thanks to others every day [partners, family members].