

her to take this class. As if by magic, she instantly forgave me for misleading her and walked into the gun shop and took the class. It was a good thing she did. The following week, while hiking alone in a nearby forest, she was abruptly approached by a naked man. Since she had her pepper spray at her side, he didn't try to do anything. The proper use of "I feel/I want" can have positive consequences beyond what you might imagine and can turn almost any communication situation around in just a few moments.

Although the "I feel/I want" method sounds simple, it can take a while to master. The first few times you use it, you'll probably trip your partner's blame detector. You'll likely say you feel "really angry" or some other emotion that makes your partner's ears fall off. Allow yourself to make a few mistakes. If your partner tries to use the "I feel/I want" method with you, allow him or her to also make mistakes. Just like learning a foreign language, it takes time before it becomes second nature. The good news is the very first time either of you use this method correctly, you'll notice how effectively it works. While it may feel confining at first, I suggest you stick to the exact structure and emotions I suggested earlier. It will greatly increase the likelihood of your partner really hearing you. When you think about it, being able to use a few simple words to reliably create feelings of intimacy is downright miraculous. Of course, all magicians know the key to mastering their art is to practice.

Miracle Reminders

1. Intimacy develops from being vulnerable with your partner and by clearly expressing what you feel and what you want.
2. To avoid blame from slipping in, use this formula: "When you (briefly describe situation), I feel (sad, hurt, afraid, or impatient) because I (explain the psychological need you have that leads to feeling the way you do)."
3. The more precisely you describe what you want from your partner, the more likely she will be able to give it to you, and the less likely you will trigger her "blame detector."

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Mastery Practice

Think of something that feels off or bad in your relationship that you haven't communicated to your partner. See if you can communicate it using the "I feel . . . because I . . ." and ". . . what I want is . . ." formula outlined in this chapter. See if you can avoid triggering your partner's blame detector as you communicate your feelings and desires. Notice how you feel after communicating this information to your sweetheart.

think that our standards are the right ones, while his way of doing things is wrong. Blame sets in. In my work with couples, I attempt to show them there are no universal standards of what should happen in a relationship. Is it right to have sex once a day, once a week, or once a year? Ultimately, it's really just a matter of personal preference. Once partners can see there's no clear-cut correct way of doing things, it becomes easier for them to share their needs without making their partner wrong for how they've acted in the past.

In chapter 2, I discussed how to discover the rules for having your partner feel you really love them. I pointed out that, unless we specifically ask, we tend to assume what works for us will work for our partner. The same is true for any of the myriad ways we interact with one another. Each of us have very specific, unspoken ideas of how things should be. When you're upset, you might think your partner "should" warmly hold you and say nice things to you. However, your partner may be the type of person who thinks an upset person should be left alone to sort things out. Couples with such differing rules can drive each other crazy unless they bring their rules out into the open.

In general, I have found there are a dozen areas in which differing rules can lead to messy disagreements. A disagreement simply means that each partner has different rules for what's right, and they've never worked out an equitable solution. I call these areas of potential disagreement the "dynamite dozen" because if you don't discuss them, they tend to blow up in your face:

The Dynamite Dozen

(Areas in which differing rules cause considerable problems):

1. How to make money decisions; who is in control of money.
2. How often to have sex and other issues of sex such as birth control, what happens if the woman becomes pregnant, and so on.
3. How to treat your partner when she is upset.
4. How to show your partner your affection and love.
5. How to discipline the kids; what are the different responsibilities each parent has toward the kids.
6. What makes the relationship truly successful.
7. What is the proper way to listen to your partner; how much listening is necessary.
8. How to handle problems and major decisions that affect both partners.
9. How much quality time should be spent together each day or week.
10. How much TV watching is allowed.
11. How much alcohol and/or drug use is allowed.
12. What is the most effective way to ask your partner to do things for you.

These twelve areas tend to be where rule disagreements have the most impact on a relationship. If you can come to agreement about how to handle these twelve

George: I can't help it if your dad drank a lot. That's not my problem.

Katie: That's true, but I'd like to feel more peaceful about this. I guess I need your help. What could we do differently that might help us both handle this situation more effectively?

George: I don't know. You could just stop worrying about it.

Katie: If I could do that, believe me, I would. But it really scares me when you drink, and I don't want to feel afraid of you. I want to have a fun, loving time together. What else might help to make this situation more agreeable for both of us?

George: Well, we could come to some compromise as to how much and how often I can drink. If I agree to stay within some boundaries that are acceptable to you, then maybe you wouldn't worry so much.

Katie: I think that's a wonderful idea! What do you think would be a fair agreement about your drinking that would help me to feel better?

George: How about I won't have more than three beers or two glasses of wine in any given night, and I'll limit my drinking to three times a week.

Katie: I think that's fair. That would certainly help me to worry less.

Katie was pretty sure George wouldn't keep to this agreement for long but kept her mouth shut to see what would happen. As she suspected, George drank about three glasses of wine and a couple of beers while at a friend's party.

She knew to avoid speaking to him while he was drunk but approached him the next day. Here's how it went:

Katie: Honey, did you notice how much you drank at the party last night?

George: Oh, I don't know. Why? Did I seem a little tipsy?

Katie: Do you remember what you agreed to so I wouldn't feel uncomfortable or worried?

George: (said with a sense of dread) Oh yeah. Honey, I'm sorry—that won't happen again.

Katie: I appreciate the apology, but what should we do if it does happen again? I need to know I can rely on you.

George: Oh honey, it just happened this one time. It won't happen again.

Katie: Well, I know you have good intentions, but in the unlikely event it does happen again during the next year, would you be willing to go to counseling together?

George: All right, all right. But it won't be a problem. You don't have to worry about it.

If you analyze what Katie did, she simply used the principles of "A PI SWAP." When George broke his agreement, she administered Plan B, asking him questions until he agreed to consequences for breaking his agreement again. When you master these methods for getting your partner to change, it will make a dramatic difference in your relationship. In a matter of minutes, you can solve situations that might take other couples years to work through. A true communication miracle!

Exercises for Communication Mastery

The following exercises were presented at the end of each chapter in the book. I have listed all of them here for your convenience. If you have not yet completed them, I urge you to do so now. The only way to master these methods is through practice:

1. Try acknowledging and appreciating your partner this week. Validate his feelings and tell him how much you appreciate specific things he does. Notice what effect this has on him and on your relationship.
2. If you haven't already done so, find out what helps to charm your partner's heart. The shorthand way of doing this is by asking your partner, "When are a couple of times you've felt most loved by me?" Pause for her answer, then proceed. "What helped you know during those occasions that I really loved you?" For a more thorough explanation of how to find out what makes your partner feel loved, reread chapter 2. Also, tell your partner what she does that helps you feel fully loved by her.
3. During the next few days, focus on using nonverbal methods to increase feelings of intimacy with your partner. Try smiling, mirroring your partner's body position, touching him frequently, and/or using the electric sex technique. Pick one of these methods right now and vow to use it tonight with your partner.
4. The next time you notice you're slightly upset at your partner, ask yourself the three questions abbreviated in the acronym WILL WISE: "What is likely to happen if I continue to insist on being right? Would I like to feel loved or be right? What is something I especially like about my partner?" Notice if thoroughly answering these three questions to yourself helps you to avoid blame and communicate in a more loving manner. If you prefer asking yourself just one question, try asking "How might I have contributed to the situation we have here?" Come up with at least three possibilities.
5. The next time you begin having an argument with your partner, immediately ask him to do a Spoon Tune with you. See how differently you feel after four or five minutes of tuning with him. Or if you prefer, you can do the "And What Else?" game instead. *Right now*, make an agreement with your partner to do one of these tools the next time either of you request it. You might even create a negative consequence if the tool isn't immediately tried when requested. It's a good idea to put this agreement in writing.

What Is a Communication Miracle?

When couples come to me for psychotherapy, they are often at their wits' end. It's not unusual for them to be screaming at each other while they sit in my office. Secretly, both people in the relationship are hoping I will act as an all-powerful judge and, after listening to the "evidence" against their partner, proclaim them to be totally innocent and their partner 100 percent guilty. I disappoint them. Instead, I tell them they're both doing things that are making intimacy impossible. I ask them if they would be willing to spend a short time trying a totally different but highly effective approach to relationship communication. I ask the same thing of you. You may not agree with everything I say in this book. That's okay. Take what feels like it will work for you, and leave the rest. However, I encourage you to test my methods in your own life. If you do, I think you'll see something quite amazing—these methods can create miracles in your relationship!

I have a unique job. I'm a psychotherapist who promises to help couples in three sessions or less. Therefore, I've focused on how to quickly turn things around for couples deeply mired in problems. Sound impossible? It isn't. All that's needed is the right theory about what really makes human beings tick and the right techniques to effectively bring out the best in yourself and others. I'm excited to present these ideas to you because I know they work. Unfortunately, I've seen that a lot of the information that exists about communication is not truly helpful. In my own

life, I've seen that the ideas I was taught in college or read in books simply didn't work in the real world of relationships. Yet, the information in this book has withstood the most difficult test possible: It even works with people who are deeply hurt, enraged, and ready to give up all hope. No one needs a book on how to communicate when they feel good, loving, and peaceful. What we all need is a book on how to communicate effectively when we're fearful, frustrated, or want to punch someone in the nose! The theory and methods in this book are so simple, and yet so powerful they will even work in the most challenging real-life situations.

Of course, you need not be deeply mired in problems to find these ideas and tools of great value to you. The same methods that can make a conflicted relationship peaceful can help make a good partnership become truly fantastic. Even if you've been happily married for many years, I'm confident these tools will help you create more intimacy than ever before. In addition, although this book is aimed at helping couples, you'll find these same ideas will also help you communicate more effectively with your boss, coworkers, children, family, and friends.

I often hear people complain that they're willing to communicate openly, but their partner is not. It is indeed easier to talk with a willing, cooperative partner—but not essential. You can use many of the methods in this book without your partner being aware of what you're doing. All they will likely notice is that you are blaming them less and are therefore safer to talk to. Yet, if your partner is the type who would be open to reading this book, by all

What We All Want (But Never Ask For)

No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.
—AESOP

In order to get the most out of your car, it helps to know what it needs to operate effectively. You need to know what fuel and oil it uses, and how to get things fixed when it's not running right. The same is true for human beings. Luckily, at our core, all human beings are pretty much the same. We all want the three As: acknowledgment, appreciation, and acceptance. In fact, the three As are like high-octane gasoline that makes the human personality run. They are the essential ingredients that convey love from one person to another. Without them we become defensive and refuse to let anyone in. If you want to have a great relationship, you will first have to satisfy your partner's needs for acknowledgment, appreciation, and acceptance. And the more effectively you can help him feel loved, the more loving he will be toward you.

I've created a metaphor that I find helpful in explaining how the human personality works. I call it "the self-esteem bank account." I define self-esteem as the

degree to which a person feels good about herself in any given moment. Let's say the average person has about ten "dollars" in her self-esteem bank account. When people have only two dollars in their bank account, they become violent. In newspapers, we read about people who went berserk when someone simply looked at them the wrong way. These people were at two "dollars" of self-esteem. When people are at zero "dollars" of self-esteem, they often try to kill themselves. With only ten "dollars" of self-esteem, we're highly motivated to not lose or spend any of our meager supply. Yet, the way we tend to go about protecting our account is almost always ineffective.

When couples are having difficulty, they inevitably blame their partner. Blame is a way of trying to "take" self-esteem "dollars" from your partner and give them to yourself. Unfortunately, this results in your partner feeling attacked, who then proceeds to blame and insult you in self-defense: "You think I'm selfish, you should look in the mirror. You're the one who everyone thinks is selfish!" The cycle goes on. Have you ever been in one of these downward spirals? I sure have. It's no fun at all. Neither partner ends up getting the love and respect they really want.

Even if your partner is very upset, *the key to get him to be able to hear you is to give him plenty of acknowledgment, appreciation, and acceptance.* The three As are like deposits for your partner's self-esteem bank account. When you give your mate the three As, his self-esteem bank "balance" temporarily goes up. As his bank balance goes up, he will naturally become more loving, more giving, and better able to listen. Therefore, when your partner is feeling stressed,

I bet that has felt very uncomfortable. I'm sorry that what I've been doing has made you feel that way." Shellie's body position, which was normally like armor, immediately softened. I suggested to Steve that he try to understand and accept Shellie's positive intention to feel safe and in control of her own body. Finally, I suggested to Steve that he begin to appreciate Shellie in nonsexual ways.

Steve was hesitant to begin appreciating his wife. He didn't have a lot of "dollars" in his self-esteem bank account, and he was afraid if he gave appreciation to his wife, he'd end up with even less. In a private session with Steve, I suggested he try a one-week "experiment" with his wife. For one week, he was to see what effect it would have to express his sincere appreciation for his wife both verbally and through warm, nonsexual hugs. Midway through the week Steve excitedly called me and said, "My wife has turned into a new woman! We've made love more times this week than in the entire previous year! What did you do to her?" I explained to Steve that learning to give your partner verbal appreciation and a caring touch can have unexpected benefits. When they walked into my office the following week, they looked like a couple on their honeymoon.

Try it for yourself. The next time your partner is in "one of her moods," acknowledge her reality, and then say what you appreciate about her. Perhaps you can give her a warm hug after she expresses her pain. Such a simple gesture of acceptance can quickly transform how your partner feels. When you and your partner give each other

acknowledgment, appreciation, and acceptance on a regular basis, you'll both feel like you're in heaven.

Miracle Reminders

1. When your partner is upset, make a deposit into his self-esteem bank account by acknowledging his perception of reality—even if you don't agree with it. Tell him you are sorry he is in pain. Then, communicate what you truly appreciate and respect about him.
2. Acceptance comes from recognizing your partner's positive intention and her pain. To tune into her positive intention, simply ask, "What positive feeling does she ultimately want from this behavior—even if she is trying to get it in an unskillful manner?" As you learn to accept your partner even when you don't like her behavior, you'll be giving your partner and yourself the gift of unconditional love.
3. By giving your mate (or anyone else for that matter) acknowledgment, appreciation, and acceptance instead of blame, you'll see a major change in how she listens and responds to you.

Miracle Reminders

1. People have specific, simple things that can be done or said to them to make them immediately feel loved.
2. You can find out how to easily charm your partner's heart by requesting she remember times she felt fully loved and asking what specifically made her know you really loved her.
3. When couples consistently take the actions that charm each other's heart, it creates an abundance of love in their shared "love account," which makes it much easier to handle problems when they arise.

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Mastery Practice

If you haven't already done so, find out what helps to charm your partner's heart. The shorthand way of doing this is by asking your partner, "When are a couple of times you've felt most loved by me?" Pause for his answer, then proceed. "What helped you know during those occasions that I really loved you?" Keep asking for as many details as possible. Also, ask yourself these questions and tell your partner what he does that helps you feel fully loved.

3

Creating Love Beyond Words

There is only one happiness in life, to love and be loved.
—GEORGE SAND

Some of the most powerful ways to charm your partner's heart can be done without uttering a single word. Psychologists estimate that 93 percent of the impact of our communication occurs through nonverbal cues. That means the words we say only account for 7 percent of the meaning and impact of our communication! How can that be? People know that talk is cheap, so they instinctively look to nonverbal cues to see if someone is being sincere. For example, you probably wouldn't believe your mate's words of love if they said them in a sarcastic tone of voice.

Most books on communication focus only on saying the right words, while ignoring how to use nonverbal methods for creating intimacy and safety. Fortunately, there's a science to being able to nonverbally create feelings of acceptance and appreciation with your partner. I have found the four methods outlined in this chapter to be particularly effective and easy to learn.