

The Secret to Lifetime Love:

Speaking and Hearing Truth

Roy and Devra Wooten

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Roy and Devra Woote

About the Authors



Roy and Devra Wooten have been working with marriages and families for over 25 years. The Wootens were involved early in leading children's homes and emergency shelters for children. They have similarly worked in residential treatment services ranging from foster parenting to senior leadership. Their passion for strengthening families has resulted in frequent requests to speak at professional conferences and churches. The Wootens are often asked by the media to speak on topics related to relational health and leadership. They have worked with thousands of couples and families as well as consulted professionally with schools, churches, and nonprofits. For two years, they followed a calling to also serve as a bivocational pastor in a church plant in the Texas Panhandle.

Roy currently serves as Executive Director of The Crucible Project (www.thecrucibleproject.org). Roy and Devra have held over 100 marriage seminars and retreats. Devra serves full time at Prairie View A&M University. Before Prairie View, Devra supported Roy and the family as he served as Administrator for Texas' largest children's home. Roy received his BS and MS in Clinical and Counseling Psychology at Abilene Christian University, and has held licenses from the Texas Department of Family and

Protective Services and the State Board of Examiners of Psychologists.

Their unwavering passion and faith in marriage begins at home (since 1988), where they strive to live out the truths taught in their weekend programs. Roy and Devra are the proud parents of two grown children.

About this book

This book is a tool for couples to use together. It will help you find a way to successfully say what you need to say. For example, we call your significant other “spouse” because we are marriage champions and advocates. It is our intent that you will be able to find helpful tools from what we have learned through our own trial and error, as well as through our work with over a thousand couples in our couples’ weekends. While we do not write the theological underpinnings of our work with couples, you will see references to scriptures that we have found helpful to couples of faith.

This text is a joint venture; we write it in hopes that you will be able to read and work through it together. We encourage you and your spouse to each have a copy, and mutually agree through compromise and collaboration about a date when you will work through the activities as a team. We support patience and grace with each other as you begin these new skills together.

Change is hard. The struggle in communication in which you find yourself is probably like well-worn ruts in a road. Your efforts to try and drive out of the ruts or keep from falling back into them will be frustrating. Learning new things always creates some initial discomfort, but eventually, with practice, we learn to do it without much effort. Learning a new way of talking to each other is difficult as well, but just as rewarding.

When you begin, you should complete every exercise in the order in which it is written; they will become more and more challenging as you go on. Upon completion of the book, you will inevitably feel drawn back to your old patterns of communication. As either or both of you notice yourselves

falling back into ruts, remember to take time out to schedule and reconvene. You can then recommit to Speaking and Hearing Truth with each other as a team.

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In our journey to create a forever together marriage we have read the work of the best experts, experienced excellent workshops, attended the greatest retreats and seminars, and handled tough discussions with ministers, counselors, and friends. We've woven all this experience together with up-to-date, research-proven certification courses.

None of this would have been possible without the opportunities to provide weekend workshops, in churches, colleges, retreat centers, and community facilities. Thanks to Maggie Russell, Brigette Jones, Shield Bearer, and the Strong Families Institute.

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Chapter One: Speaking the Truth

We Don't Say What We Really Need to Say.

We do not enter this world with a filter on what we say. Knowing what to say and what not to say is learned through our experiences. Spend some time with a two-year-old; you will know exactly what she is thinking, usually as soon as she thinks it! If she is hungry, she will let you know in a demanding fashion. If there is a perception that someone else is getting attention, or taking something that she deems to be her possession, she will show anger or sadness without reservation. And if there is someone in the environment she perceives as a potential threat, fear will drive all of her behaviors; she will move away and protect herself.

Somewhere along the way, we develop a filtering mechanism that attempts to hide what we are really thinking and feeling. It begins when a parent, teacher, coach, older sibling, minister, or other important person in our life tells us...

“Don't say mean things.”

“Don't cry... only sissies cry!”

“Don't say things that hurt other people's feelings.”

“Don't tell someone something like that! It isn't good manners.”

“Don’t let him see that you are afraid of him. “

This filtering mechanism is good for society. Imagine if everyone shared all their thoughts and feelings at all times with all people and in all situations. Oh, my! With good reason, most of us learn to be more discerning about what thoughts and feelings we share with certain people, and when we share them. We hide what we really think in order to survive socially, in peer groups at school and with family and friends. And when we meet that someone special, we are on our best behavior! We do our best not to offend, in order to impress them. We put our best foot forward in order to hopefully land that second date, or further attract their attention. As the relationship develops, however, the story we attempt to write together begins to reveal what we have attempted to hide. Sometimes it takes a very long time - several chapters of story-writing - until we learn the truth about what we actually thought or felt about something early in the relationship. As our story develops, we begin to learn more and more about what our spouse actually thought or felt about something early on in the relationship.

Sometimes, we train ourselves to not bring up a subject because our relationship history tells us that it is not safe. Other times, we decide that the subject isn’t worth the effort to bring it up. It can seem like when you try to have a conversation with your spouse, you are met with stonewalling, criticism, contempt, cynicism, or defensiveness. In these instances, you have probably decided not to bring up that subject again. People who engage in these “Marriage Killers” do things like...

- Walk out and slam the door
- Look for fault in anything the other is saying/doing

- Roll their eyes and sigh
- Hang up without saying goodbye
- Make excuses
- State how defective you are
- Treat you like you are worthless
- Refuse to negotiate or compromise
- Deny responsibility
- Spout put-downs

Have no regard for what other options might be
 Tell you how horrible other people think you are
 Communicate hostility and disgust towards you
 Blame you and others for their actions

According to the latest relationship research, if either or both spouses engage in forms of stonewalling, criticism, contempt, or cynicism, communication begins to slide into hurtful conversation and even violence, which begins the downward spiral into divorce. These “Marriage Killers” stand in the way of our ability to speak and hear truth.

The secret to a lifetime, together-forever love and creating the type of relationship we have always wanted and that our hearts most desire is not:

~~better and more sex~~

~~having no in-laws~~

~~having he/she always agree with my decisions~~

~~enjoying all the same activities~~

~~having my spouse change my unhappiness~~

No! What we have learned in our work with countless couples is that the secret to a lifetime love is learning and practicing the skills of being able to communicate and understand truth. In this way, my spouse will really “get it,” and I will really understand and “get” my spouse. That is what we call “speaking my truth” and “hearing my spouse’s truth.”

We Want to Be Heard - But We Forget That Our Spouse Wants to Be Heard, Too!

One of the most frustrating things about being in an argument is that it seems as if our spouse is not listening to us. Instead of listening, it seems that they are just focusing on their own next point in the argument. They focus on our words only long enough to find something that can be turned around and used against us. They listen for the 1% of our conversation that they can disagree with, so that they can throw out the entire statement as unacceptable, unreasonable, and untrue. They interrupt so that we can never finish a thought or sentence. They do not seem to care about what we are trying to express.

When we ask spouses to take a moment to look in the mirror, the paragraph above often sounds more like this: One of the most frustrating things about being in an argument is that I find myself not listening to my spouse. Instead of listening, I too frequently focus on my own next point in our argument. Sometimes I focus on what my spouse is saying only long enough to find something that can be turned around and used to defend my point or counter their point. When a strong

point is being made that really hurts me, I often look for the 1% of what u=is being said that is just unacceptable, unreasonable, and untrue, so that I can throw 100% of what they are saying out of the conversation. I interrupt so that my spouse is not able to finish a thought or sentence. In fact, sometimes I probably give the impression that I do not care about what my spouse is trying to express.

When a depressed spouse comes to her first counseling session, one of the issues most commonly shared is that her spouse does not “listen”, “get me”, or “have a clue”. After spending some time with her, we often learn that she has said what she needs to say to him over and over in many different venues and ways, but she has never felt heard.

We often find that when he is given a chance to communicate what he thinks she is struggling with, he is able to describe her issues pretty well. We find that something was getting through during all her attempts to speak her truth. It seems that he has absorbed much of what she has said over the years, but he has just never shared that understanding with her in such a way that she knows that he was listening to her.

Devra shares a story about a time her father was in the hospital for an extended period of time. She was a dutiful daughter, spending long days and nights by his side. Because of his greater than three-month hospitalization, everyone seemed to know him and his family. Nurses, physical therapists, other patients and their families, nurse’s aides, and clergy all became very comfortable with visiting him. Yet every time a professional entered the room to provide medication, check for vitals, share education, etc., they would check his hospital wristband and ask his name and birthday. Despite their mutual feelings of familiarity, they still checked to make sure that they had the correct patient in front of them before providing medical care.

Why?

The hospital bracelet served as a kind of receipt. A receipt is something we give someone who just gave us money. It gives details about what they have given us and what we have exchanged. The receipt communicates that a transaction has taken place. A sale is usually not considered complete until a receipt is given; the receipt is proof that the transaction occurred.

Our relationships are something like that. We become and feel familiar with our spouse, but we often stop checking with them to see if what they are trying to share with us is what we have actually heard. We stop checking to make sure we are really with them. We stop giving them a receipt for what they have given us. Without the receipt, they do not know with assurance that what they have given us was actually received.

Roy's father loves to tell the joke about the old married couple who went to counseling.

The wife told the counselor, "I just don't know if he loves me anymore. I can't tell if there are any feelings for me at all. I can't remember the last time he told me that he loved me!" When the counselor asked for his side of the story, the husband said, "I told her I loved her when I married her, and if anything changes, I'll let her know."

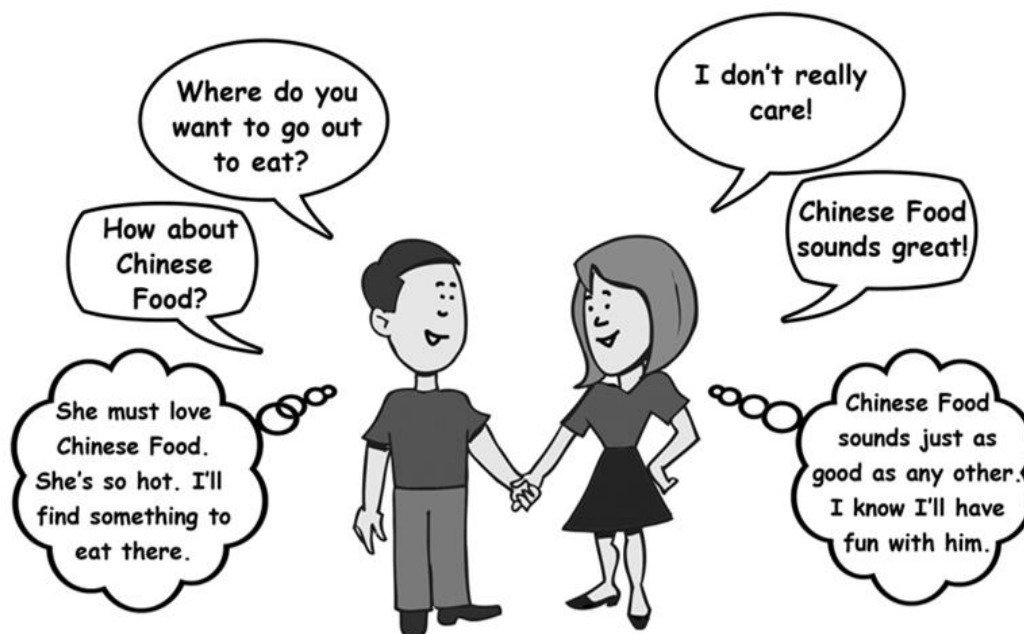
Without giving his wife a receipt that he loves her, she did not know. Without feeling heard, we frequently make up stories of our own. In the absence of feeling like "she gets me", we begin to believe that she does not care, does not love us -- or loves someone else!

“Do not lie to one another...” Colossians 3:9a New American Standard Bible

Where Are We Going to Eat?

One of the most dreaded discussions in dating is deciding where we are going to have dinner. When Roy picked up Devra for one of their very first dates (circa 1984), he asked her where she wanted to go to eat. She did not have a preference. He was trying to impress her, and as a young man, he had never been to a Chinese restaurant. He had heard others who seemed to be financially well off talk about how great Chinese food was to them, and he wanted to make a great impression on her. So he asked if she would like to eat Chinese food, to which she responded agreeably.

It was obvious to Roy that Devra had dined at Chinese establishments before, since she was familiar with the menu; it looked totally scary to him. And from that first Chinese food date, Roy assumed that Devra loved eating Chinese food.



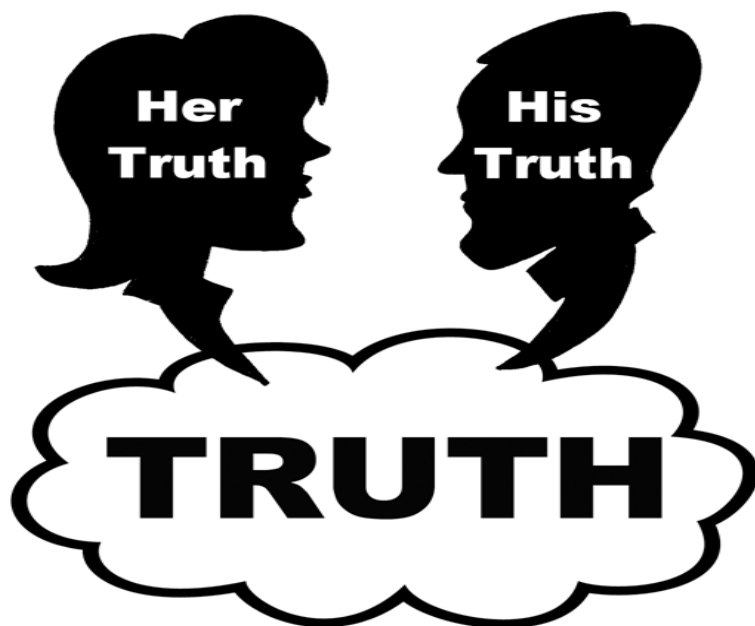
It was a very long time before Roy shared with Devra that he did not care for Chinese food; there were few options on the menu that matched his meat-and-potatoes palate. Over the years, when he wanted to treat Devra or make her feel special, he would take her out to the best Chinese restaurant he could find. In his mind, he would sacrifice what he really desired to eat so that she could enjoy eating at her favorite restaurant.

Devra enjoyed eating Chinese food, but it really never mattered to her whether they dined at Chinese, Tex-Mex, or more traditional American food restaurants. She simply enjoyed the time that the two of them shared together, talking about their day.



Fast forward about ten years in their marriage to see how not speaking truth causes problems:





His Truth, Her Truth and The Truth!

For every situation in a relationship there are usually three truths. The three truths are always different from each other. There is his truth, her truth, and The Truth.

The Truth about the situation is simply what objectively happened. It consists of the specifics. That includes everything observed through our five senses: what we see, hear, touch, smell, and taste. Nothing else! The truth does not include what we thought or felt about the situation. It does not include how we interpreted the situation. It includes only what might be observable through a camera and microphone, not the motives or meaning behind what is seen and heard. The truth consists solely of the data, and the data alone.

His Truth and Her Truth are the stories that they tell themselves, or make up, about The Truth. Your Truth is the sound of your voice in your head telling you how you interpreted what just happened. It includes what you are feeling and thinking. It also includes your opinions about the motives, thoughts, and feelings of others. It is Your Truth because it is the story that you are telling yourself about that specific situation.

In the example of our discussion about where to eat, Roy's truth is that his wife really loves Chinese food, and that he wants to make her feel loved and special. Roy dislikes Chinese food; but he sacrifices his desires and chooses to participate in an effort to make Devra feel special. His truth is that she does not appreciate his sacrifices for her happiness.

Devra's truth is that she enjoys Chinese food along with many other types of food, but she enjoys spending time with Roy more than she enjoys where they dine together. When he confronts her, she seems to Roy to be oblivious to what she has done, and she feels frustrated that she is being blamed for how he is feeling. She feels like she is always being judged as doing something wrong.

The Truth is that Roy suggested eating Chinese food and Devra agreed. Over the years, Roy and Devra dined at Chinese food restaurants. Roy said, "Why don't you ever do anything nice for me?" and Devra said, "Why do you always think I've done something wrong"?

Why Arguments Happen

Roy taught several semesters of "Intro to Psychology" classes to college undergraduates early in his career. He enjoyed sharing the research behind how several people can view the same situations and report different details. For

instance, there is a great amount of evidence today backing the idea that crime scene eyewitnesses are not very good at identifying the perpetrator!

People have been studying this phenomenon for years. They've concluded that the reason people differ so much in interpretations is due to differences in our brains. All sensory input such as taste, smell, touch, sight, and hearing travels through sensory nerves to the spinal cord and into the brain stem. Between the frontal lobes (the thinking part of our brain) and our brain stem is a group of brain structures known as the limbic system. This is the feeling part of our brain.

The data that we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch is felt first. As it travels through the feeling portion, our feeling memories are triggered... that's why when we smell certain scents we automatically begin to feel great. An example of this is encountering the scent of our favorite dish cooked by our grandmother.

The sensation or smell then travels to the thinking part of our brain where we interpret what is sent from the feeling part of our brain. The thinking portion processes it with a number of high cognitive functions to judge and define what it is that we just experienced. What feels like "just the facts" usually includes feelings and many judgments or opinions about what we just experienced.

As data travels from our senses, it is filtered by our feelings. By the time we think about it, the data is no longer just data, it has been warped by our emotions.

What do you see?

Whatever you report, I submit that that is your truth. Some people who look at the drawing above first see a seal. Others see a horse or donkey first. Both answers are correct. Neither answer is wrong. If you have spent most of your life fascinated with horses, you probably saw a horse first and most easily. If you have been more fascinated with seals, you probably saw a seal first. If you see a seal first, you are no better than those who first saw a horse; and those who saw a horse first are no better than those who first saw a seal.



All arguments happen because there is a huge difference between his truth and her truth.

Arguments disappear as we close the gap between his truth, her truth, and The Truth. In our own relationship and in the many relationships into which we have been invited to help, we have come to the conclusion that Speaking and Hearing the Truth is the core place to make a difference in preventing unhealthy relationships and divorce. It is the core place at which relationships can be restored, hearts can be reunited, and love can be rekindled.

The Origins of My Truth

My truth has a number of factors that influence its development. In a prior section we discussed how the brain

was built to interpret everything we see, hear, smell, taste and touch. My Truth begins with the data, which is The Truth. The data include every inarguable fact. The Truth includes only what can be objectively observed.

The truth, or data, is that the room is 72 degrees Fahrenheit. The truth does not include whether the room is “hot” or “cold.” Whether 72 degrees is hot or cold is an interpretation, and therefore arguable, and therefore not the objective truth. It might be your truth, but it’s not The Truth as we are defining it here.

If our spouse returns home at the end of day at 6PM when it was communicated that they would return at 5:30, the truth is that they are late. Why we think the other person is late is My Truth, not The Truth. What we believe about the value they place on our relationship is My Truth, not The Truth.

Cindy called to set up an appointment with us because she was “so tired of being hurt over and over by Dan being so inconsiderate. He doesn’t treat me like I’m even a human being.” During the first hour of our daylong Marriage Intensive marathon coaching session, Cindy began to tell us more about the problem.

“Last week he called me at work to tell me that he was picking up supper and bringing it home. He never asks me if I have plans for cooking supper or what I want to eat for supper. When he gets it into his head, he just picks up whatever he wants and I’m expected to like it and eat it!”

Devra asked, “Tell me about the movie playing in your head. What did you think and feel about what happened? What did it mean about his value of you?”

“He obviously didn’t want to eat any of my cooking. I think husbands should be happy with whatever their wives cook

and not complain. When I cook, he sometimes doesn't like what I make. So when he thinks he can't handle what I'm cooking, he calls to tell me he is bringing home supper. He doesn't think much of me at all! If he really thought of me as someone important to him, he would at least ask me what I would like for him to pick up. I told him to get whatever he wants because he'll be eating alone tonight and I went out with some of my friends from work.”

The Truth of the situation that occurred is that he called to inform her that he was picking up supper for the night and did not ask her what she wanted. Cindy's truth included her assumption and belief about how a husband should treat his wife when she cooks a meal for them. In the absence of other information, her truth also assumed a motive for his call: He does not want to eat her cooking tonight. What Cindy assumes about her husband's motive may be true, but until it is confirmed, it is only her truth. Based upon her truth about the motives for the call and her belief system about how a wife who has cooked should be treated, her truth expanded to a feeling that she is not important in Dan's life. Her relationship is damaged when, instead of speaking her truth to Dan and hearing his truth, she acts on her truth.

My truth incorporates my values, beliefs, and world view. My values are the things that are most important to me; my beliefs are my theories about why I am the way I am and why others in my life are the way they are; and my worldview is what I believe about everything external to me and most of my relationships.

Take a few moments and think through the following questions about how these aspects of your truth are impacting your relationship, both positively and negatively.

How My Values Influence Our Relationship:

How My Beliefs Influence Our Relationship:

How My World View Influences Our Relationship:

My truth also includes my experience of our history together, from my first impressions of my spouse to the present moment of interaction. This includes my opinions and judgments about my spouse's motives, beliefs and feelings. It also includes the objective and inarguable facts throughout our relationship. My truth includes every joy and disappointment, every time I have been hurt, and every time I have hurt my spouse.

Steve and Linda had been married for over thirty-five years when they called to see if we could help them. During one of our phone conferences, Steve began to explain the problem as he saw it.

“When I met her I knew she was out of my league. She was dating another guy and so I waited until they broke up to ask her out. We dated on and off for about three months until one of my friends said that he saw her out with him again. I

confronted her, but she denied it. Since then, every time I see a guy I think is better looking than me talking to her or that is new in her office, I begin to have doubts about whether or not she is going to be faithful to me. I still believe she lied to me back then, and I sometimes wonder how many times she's lied to me since.”

Steve's truth, that Linda was not honest with him early in their relationship, continued to haunt their marriage of over thirty-five years. The reason it was hurting his marriage is because he had not spoken his truth, but had kept it a hidden secret, letting it complicate his decisions regarding their relationship.

Stop reading for several minutes and think through the following questions to help you realize your truth about the early aspects of your relationship history and how they are impacting your relationship, both positively and negatively.

My First Impression and Earliest Memories of My Spouse:

How Our Early History Together Influences Our Relationship:

How My Spouse's Beliefs, Values and World View Influence Our Relationship:

How Our Most Painful Relationship Moment Influences Our Relationship:

How Our Greatest Relationship Moment Influences Our Relationship:

My truth incorporates my relationship history as well, from the first time we noticed another person to the time we broke up. It includes the totality of all of our relationships over our entire lifetime. The level of intimacy and the depth of my heartbreaks influence how I interpret The Truth and help form My Truth.

Alyssa and Fredo were a new couple with a baby on the way. Both had been in lengthy prior relationships, and Fredo was asking for help because he did not want this relationship to end the way that his prior relationship had. Fredo began telling us what was going on:

“Alyssa never tells me anything. When she is upset, I only find out about it from my sister. Alyssa calls my sister and tells me what she really thinks about important decisions like whether we are going to try to buy a house or rent an apartment before or after the baby comes. When I confront her about it, she cries and goes in the bedroom and locks the door. I have to talk to her through the closed door until she finally stops crying and lets me in.”

After we asked them if there is any violence in the home, we asked Alyssa to share what is going on for her when these incidents happen.

“You don’t really want to know. I’ve told Fredo about it a couple of times. My boyfriend that I lived with before I met Fredo, well, there was something wrong with him. When he didn’t get his way, he would throw things and push me down. The last time, I went to the emergency room because of what he did to me.”

Alyssa’s truth, because of her earlier abusive relationship, was that men are dangerous to disagree with. Her truth, whether unconscious or conscious, was that it is unsafe to tell a man what she really thinks or to express her opinion openly. Because she was incapable of speaking her truth at that moment in their relationship, Alyssa was keeping her relationship from having the joy that would come if she learned and practiced these skills and worked on the personal issues of trust that were related to the domestic violence that she had experienced.

In the next few minutes, work through the following questions about how your experience in prior relationships might be impacting your present relationship, both positively and negatively.

How My Prior Relationships Influence Our Relationship:

How My Spouse’s prior Relationships Influence Our Relationship:

My truth also includes my family experiences. How my parents handled disagreements affects how I handle disagreements. How they handled relationship commitments has an impact on how I think about relationship commitments. How key family members spoke about the opposite sex and their values and beliefs also impact the development of My Truth. My relationship with my parents, siblings, and extended family, including all positive and negative experiences, are all a part of the development of my truth.

Sean and Tami had been married for less than a year when they came to one of our Life Together Forever Weekends. During one of the breaks, they told us that they are never able to resolve any issues or disagreements. “Yeah, as soon as I start telling him what is bothering me, he puts on his boots and heads out to the barn. I followed him out there a few times, and he would just get in his truck and tell me he needed some space and he’d be right back.”

As we visited in those few minutes, we asked him to tell us what it was like during his childhood and how his parents and siblings dealt with negative emotions like anger, sadness or hurt. He shared how quiet his home would become when there was a disagreement. “I never saw my parents argue. They would just let time heal everything.” It was eye opening to Tami to learn that Sean had never learned how to have a disagreement in a healthy way. He had learned to “stuff it” and just hope that it would go away.

For the next several minutes work through the following questions about how what you learned from your parents, siblings and other key people in your early years may be impacting your relationship, both positively and negatively.

How My Parents' Decisions about Relationships Influence Our Relationship:

How My Father's Beliefs about Women Influence Our Relationship:

How My Mother's Beliefs about Men Influence Our Relationship:

Ways I Am Glad I Am Like My Parents:

Ways I Am Not Proud That I Am Like My Parents:

The Truth about Speaking and Hearing the Truth

What we have learned in our relationship, and in the many relationships into which we have been invited, is that many times when we argue, we do not speak our truth about the issue. In the cases that we do, there is no assurance that what we attempted to communicate made it into our spouse's awareness.

Very often, the actual issue of the argument is evaded by our disagreement about how to talk about the issue. In other words, we have trouble identifying and communicating what the issue is, because we end up focusing on how we are speaking to each other (and not hearing each other). Until we learn how to speak and hear truth, we will have difficulty resolving the issue that is causing our relationship so much pain.

Here are the inarguable facts, the truth, about Speaking and Hearing the Truth:

- 1) No one knows My Truth unless I Speak it!
- 2) There is no way to know My Spouse's Truth unless I Hear it!

Speaking the Truth

Remember:

Change is hard. The communication struggle in which you find yourself is probably like well-worn ruts in a road. Your efforts to try to drive out of the ruts or keep from falling back into them will be frustrating. Learning new things always creates some discomfort at first but eventually, with practice,

we learn to do it without much effort. Learning to Speak the Truth to each other will be difficult, but very rewarding.

We have witnessed Speaking and Hearing the Truth significantly change relationships. Couples arguing over money, parenting, sex, in-laws, chores, recreation, faith, and other areas have significantly increased their marital satisfaction and intimacy by following the rules of Speaking and Hearing the Truth.

Lisa and Jimmy grew up in the same town, going to the same schools and the same church since they were born. They were in a serious relationship as she completed high school and left for college. Jimmy, who was a couple of years younger, asked her to marry him and gave her a Promise Ring just a couple of months into her college years. They were married just after his graduation, before he left for Air Force boot camp in San Antonio.

During their first several years of marriage, Lisa and Jimmy experienced a great deal of struggle. Between his absences for deployment and their multiple re-locations, they were unable to find a positive rhythm of interacting. A pastor referred them to us, and when Lisa called to make the appointment, she began the conversation by telling us, “I don’t think I ever really knew Jimmy. I thought I knew him, but he is not the man I thought he was.”

Jimmy and Lisa assumed that because they had been raised in the same town, going to the same church and schools and dating only each other, they knew everything there was to know about each other. When they were able to spend time together early in the marriage, they would act on the assumption that they knew what the other person really wanted. When their spouse did not do what they expected them to do, each thought they knew with certainty the reason why. It seemed that every area of their marriage was in

conflict within just a few short months.

She wanted to start a family soon, and he wanted to wait until his military commitment was completed. She believed that they should share responsibilities inside and outside of the house, while he thought his domain should include vehicle repairs, lawn work and household repairs, and that she should do all of the other chores. She thought taking care of her husband's sexual needs should not ever need to be more than once every week to ten days, while he assumed that they should have sex every night unless one of them was sick or otherwise unable. He understood that they should spend any bonus money as they received it because he worked hard for the money; she thought that they should plan for the future and for emergencies by always putting some or all of his bonuses into savings.

Their differences of opinion about chores, sex, when to start their family, how to handle their finances, and many other issues were not the problem in their relationship. Their problem was that they did not realize how each of their individual truths were not shared by the other, and in the absence of that knowledge they were taking action on their assumptions (their truths). This was damaging their relationship. They were not only not speaking their truths to each other; they were also unable or unwilling to really hear the truth of the other person.

We are happy to report that Jimmy and Lisa are doing well together. They spent a day with us in a Marriage Intensive and developed a plan for speaking and hearing each other's truth. The plan included specific appointments to address each of their concerns one at a time. They had crucial conversations regarding when to start their family and how to handle finances. As they resolved each issue, they found themselves in a pattern of positive interaction and beginning

to really like each other again. Jimmy and Lisa did the hard work of learning the skills we are sharing in this book, and it paid off in a marriage that is more committed -- and in a relationship with a higher degree of intimacy than either had ever imagined!

Speaking My Truth is not the same as “just talking.” Speaking My Truth is a very specific way of communicating that focuses on helping me share the story I am telling myself about a specific situation, and any requests that I need or want to make about it, in a way that our spouse actually hears, understands, and “gets.”

Speaking My Truth begins with **a request or check for attention**. Roy shares a story about how frustrating it was early in their relationship as all of his attention was focused on reading, watching television or working on the computer. He would notice Devra entering his radar of peripheral vision mid-paragraph in a story. She would feel unheard as she had usually begun her conversation in another room in the house and was halfway through the story by the time she arrived in front of him.

It does not matter what is said if there is no one there to hear it. It is always best to ask your spouse if this is a good time to Speak and Hear Truth. Just because you are ready to speak your truth does not mean your partner is ready to hear your truth. Schedule a time for the conversation (e.g. after we put the children to bed) instead of trying to force the conversation at an inconvenient time.

Ask almost anyone, and they will tell you that they fear these words coming from their spouse’s lips: “Honey, we need to talk.” Checking to see if your spouse is ready to have a conversation is the goal, not saying it in such a way that will raise your spouse’s defense mechanisms before the

conversation even begins.

How do you ask? Take a few moments and think through the following questions. Spend a little time visiting with your spouse about how he or she would answer each question. Use the information you gather to help you decide how best to engage your spouse when you are ready to hear his or her truth and when you are ready to speak your truth.

The Best Time of Day for Speaking and Hearing Truth For Me:

The Best Way for My Spouse to Get My Attention Before Speaking Truth:

What I Can Do to Request My Spouse's Attention:

Some spouses are so excited to finally have the undivided attention of their spouse that they provide a long list of items they have felt the need to discuss for a long time. Being on the receiving end of this can feel like someone just vomited on them. Or worse, they feel as if someone has riddled them with bullets from an automatic assault weapon! Although it might be difficult, it is very important when Speaking My

Truth to Stick to One Subject.

If you want to successfully speak your truth and have that one subject heard, you will find a way to refrain from bringing up old issues, dragging in unrelated behaviors, and giving a laundry list of complaints. If you are able to speak your truth on one subject effectively so that your spouse is able to “get” you, you will then be more likely to engage your spouse in a future conversation on another subject.

In the next several moments, consider an issue in which you might need to speak your truth to your spouse. Perhaps you have a disagreement about who does what chore, or how you should be engaged with your in-laws. Maybe it involves finances, sex, or faith. If this is the first time you are working through this process, we want you to consider something real, a real issue. However, we want you to learn the process, so we want you to consider beginning with a real issue that is not the hottest issue in your relationship.

Over the next few pages, we will walk you through a way to speak your truth about this issue. Take a few minutes and complete the next set of prompts to help you put together a specific plan to assure success in speaking your truth to your spouse about an issue.

A Pressing Issue In Our Relationship:

A Specific Behavior That Would Help Resolve This Issue:

If what I hope to do is to have my truth heard, I will need to speak in a way that does not activate my spouse's defense systems. One of the most provocative words that activates most people's defense systems is the word "you".

You did....

You think...

You never...

You feel...

You are just like

When we hear the word "you" in a conversation, especially if there is any level of negative emotional energy attached to it, we activate our defense systems. We tend to either withdraw from the other person and the relationship, or to want to engage in a fight of words and wills. Sometimes we curl up into a ball and freeze, paralyzed with fear. Activating our spouse's defense system will ruin our Speaking and Hearing the Truth experience. In order to avoid the word "you", it is important to **Speak from the "I"**.

We can choose to begin to speak our truth in a way that promotes our spouse being open to receive and hear it, or we can speak in such a way that we push our spouse's buttons and activate their defense mechanisms. We cannot control how they will hear or react to the conversation, but we will have a better chance for success when we begin with specific language that keeps them open to hear us and stay with the conversation.

We have put together a chart to help illustrate language choices that will likely help keep your spouse open to the

conversation.

Are you provoking a defensive response?

Put a check mark next to the column which best describes you.

	Defensive	Open	
	You made me late to work.	I was really upset this morning when my low fuel warning light came on. I had to stop for gas in order to make it to work and I was late. I remembered that you used my car yesterday. When you left my car on empty, I had to make an unscheduled stop for gas. I was late and I became angry.	
	You think it doesn't matter if I'm late to work because I don't make as much money as you.	It felt to me like you didn't care if I was late to work or not. Sometimes I feel like it doesn't matter to you whether or not I'm able to keep my job because I don't make that much money or I can just get another job.	

	Defensive	Open	
	You feel like everything is just great as long as you bring home your check and mow the grass every week. You don't care about how I feel.	I sometimes wonder if you care about how I feel when you leave the car on empty. I think maybe you think that as long as you bring home your check and do the chores like mow the grass that I'll be happy. Sometimes I feel like you don't really care how I feel.	
	You act just like your dad. You know he never cared about what you and your mom thought or felt about what he did.	I know you have told me that you don't want to be like your dad in the way he disregarded what you and your mom felt or thought, but I think I know how you felt disregarded.	

When we Speak from the “I” we are more clearly able to take responsibility for any role we may have played in the situation. We are also welcoming our spouse into the conversation, instead of pushing them away by activating their defense systems.

Another key rule in successfully Speaking My Truth is to **Speak From My Experience**. On our couple's weekends with audiences large and small, we will always ask if there is anyone in the room who is a mind reader. The

couples laugh, and no one to date has seriously claimed to be able to read other's minds.

You are not a mind reader either. Too often, when we begin sharing My Truth, we begin by telling our spouse what they are thinking, feeling, and believing. We tell them the motives behind their actions as if we are able to read their mind. As we engage in mind reading, what we are truly sharing is what we have on our own mind about the other person. It usually does not look good on us, and it is another way to activate our spouse's defense systems.

One of the ways to think about speaking from my experience is to think about the senses. What did I see, hear, touch, taste, or smell? Also, refrain from assuming that anything you heard about the situation from a third party is true.

The following approach will almost guarantee that your spouse's defenses will go up:

"You hate me, don't you? You sent a text to Skyler about how horrible a spouse I am. You think you can tear me down and I'll never know."

Instead, try this:

"Jaime called to tell me that Skyler was talking about receiving a text from you saying I am a horrible spouse."

Speaking from my experience means communicating what I observed, what I thought about what I observed, and how I felt about the experience. In order to speak my truth, I need to share from my actual experience, instead of relating what I think their experience was.

Stop reading for several minutes and think through the issue. Make sure that you separate your truth from the facts when

responding to the next series of prompts.

What I Observed When My Spouse's Behavior Brought Up the Issue:

What Story I Made Up About What I Observed:

What Feelings I Have Because of the Story I'm Telling Myself (Sad Angry Scared Happy Excited Tender):

One of the goals of Speaking My Truth is to ask for something. It is pretty awesome for my spouse to get me. It feels good. But if it does not change anything, then we believe it is a waste of the Speaking My Truth tool. If all we want to do is to talk, we can probably do that without this tool. But we want something changed. We want our spouse to do, or stop doing, something.

Sam and Jan began struggling as they prepared for their wedding. They had purposefully chosen a lengthy engagement to make sure they were ready for their marriage commitment. As they began to put their wedding plans into motion, they noticed that they seemed to be making each other upset. Jan shared, "I tell Sam how he really doesn't need to be involved in every single little detail and that he should trust me. Like last week, I told him that he made me really upset when he looked at my three favorite wedding invitations and told me that they were too feminine. He just doesn't get it!"

The more we visited with Jan and Sam, the more we pressed Jan to tell Sam specifically what she wanted. We helped her find the words to ask Sam to trust her with more of the little details in the wedding planning, and to make sure that he was clear about anything that he would like to happen or not happen at the wedding. Sam was so happy. He knew that he was making Jan mad, but he was genuinely clueless about what he could do to keep from hurting her in the future. He thought she was just uptight about the wedding planning!

Once Jan made her request, Sam knew exactly what she needed. He agreed to give her more space with the details because he really did not care that much about most of the decisions. He wanted to be involved in the planning of the ceremony and the invitation list. She agreed, and they both learned a valuable tool to help them communicate -- not only what is bothering them in the future, but also what requests they have for behavior change in each other going forward.

Telling our spouse the problem is only part of our ability to get what we want or need. We cannot assume that our spouse understands how to fix the problem by just hearing about it. That type of guesswork has a very low success rate. After we communicate what the issue or problem is, we need to be very specific in asking for what it is that we want changed.

It is essential to **Say What You Need to Say** so that you are able to make the requested change in your spouse's behavior. One of Roy's favorite sayings is, "the answer is always no unless you ask." If you do not ask, you will assume that the answer is no. Asking for what you really want is the only way for you to get it. Sometimes we assume that if our spouse understands how we feel, he or she will make what seems to us the only logical or commonsense conclusion about what we really want. Making such an assumption will only lead to the issue reappearing. After

sharing the problem and how you feel about the issue, say what you need to say and make your request clearly and openly.

Sometimes we ask for what we want in such a general way that our spouse readily agrees to do it. However, after some time the issue reappears even when we find that our request was met with general follow through. Our spouse tried to meet the need in the best way they could, according to the way they understood the request. Unfortunately, the request was so general that their notion concerning what was requested was different from the other spouse's idea about what was actually desired.

One couple we worked with genuinely loved each other and tried to make their relationship a lifetime love. She told us how she did not feel loved by her spouse, and that she had used our Speaking My Truth tool twice; but he was still not showing her that he loved her. He reported that he just did not understand, because he kept showing her that he loves her and she still did not feel that she is loved despite his best effort.

When we asked her to tell us some specific actions that he could take to show her that he loved her, she had a long list. She wanted him to hold her hand when they walked together without being prompted. She wanted him to ask if she needed something to drink if he left the room to refill his own drink. She needed him to give her a hug as soon as they saw each other after work each day. He was receptive and excited to meet her requests. He then shared how hard it had been for him since she first asked him to show her that he loves her more. He had picked up all the overtime he could, to pay for several flower bouquets, stuffed animals, and chocolate boxes. He had been very disappointed that all of his efforts had failed.

It is imperative to request specific, measurable changes of action. If you were making a video of the behavior you desire to change, what would the camera show? Tell your spouse what it is that you are specifically requesting him or her to do or not do anymore.

The Specific Behavior I Want Changed:

What It Would Look Like If I Watched It Through a Camera Lens:

It is important to claim what you are thinking and feeling as your own. Instead of saying, “you made me feel...” we encourage couples to say:

“When you (specific behavior)...

I thought...

And I felt.... .”

Do you or your spouse control your emotions? Can anyone control you and your emotions? We believe that you have within you the ultimate power of determining what you think and how you feel. Except in extreme cases of abuse and violence, you and only you can decide what you feel and what you do with what you feel.

We have worked with a large number of couples who tell us

they are “stuck”. Usually, at least one or both spouses believe that their feelings and reactions are the “fault” of their spouse. The idea that they have choices in how they feel never crosses their minds. We have a role in how we think and feel in every occurrence of our relationship. We always have a role in our relationship; if we look hard enough, we will usually be able to see how it is that we are contributing to the situation that has us most upset.

Mike was really angry at his wife of ten years, Debbie. For ten years he had trusted his work clothes to his Debbie to clean and iron. As a stay-at-home mom, she had readily accepted this chore to save the family laundry expenses. Once in a while, her laundry chores would be interrupted with a parenting issue, and Mike would have to choose between being on time to work with a wrinkled shirt or ironing his shirt and arriving late. Mike told us how much of a problem this pattern in their relationship had been.

At one point in the session, we asked Mike if there was anything that he was doing to contribute to the problem. He could not think of anything that he could do differently; but when we pressed him, he was able to remember several times over the years when Debbie had been sick, or away on a trip to visit relatives. At those times, he was able to take care of his own laundry. He told us that before finishing his evening he would double check what he was wearing in the morning. If he needed to iron, he would decide if he would do it that evening or set his alarm fifteen minutes earlier the next morning.

As he was telling us his capabilities in taking care of his own laundry, the light went on for him. He said, “You know what I haven’t been doing? I haven’t been checking the night before and taking things into my own hands if she’s had a particularly busy day that laundry day. That’s how I’m

contributing to this problem. All I have to do to solve this is to plan what I'm wearing better.”

During the course of our session, he was able to move from saying, “My wife makes me angry when she doesn't launder my shirts, and there is nothing I can do about it,” to saying, “I get angry when I do not have an ironed shirt to wear to work in the morning. I think I will plan what I want to wear, and check to see if it is ironed before I go to bed.”

It is important for the person Speaking My Truth to **Own My Thoughts, Feelings, and Assumptions**. The spouse who claims them as their own will find their personal power and choices in the relationship that seems stuck. The defense system of the hearing spouse will be down long enough to actually hear all that is being spoken.

What I Observed When My Spouse's Behavior Brought Up the Issue:

What I Thought About Those Actions:

What I Felt About Those Actions:

Using your answers to the questions above, complete the following sentences:

When you... (describe the action of your spouse you want changed)

I think... (what is your truth about your spouse's action?)

I feel... (how did the action affect you?)

Perhaps you have heard the saying, "Why say in a book what can be said best in a sentence?" Too many words cause confusion. The more words we use, the more likely it is that we will not get our truth heard. That is why it is so important to **Be Specific and Brief** when Speaking My Truth successfully.

Being brief and specific removes all doubt about what it is that is being communicated. Without specificity, the Hearer will likely attempt to understand what is being said based upon their truth. In the absence of specific information, the hearer will tell a story to him or herself about what it is that their spouse is attempting to communicate. And in that story, there will be a great deal of room for confusion. Be specific in what you are communicating, in order to take all the guesswork out of the conversation.

We have encouraged women to speak to their husbands as if they were speaking to a young teen. Speaking with that kind of brevity and specificity, as if to an eighth-grader, may seem condescending; but it will keep the communication clear enough for everyone to know without a doubt what it is that is being spoken.

We have met men with very high intelligence who were still unable to clearly communicate what they were thinking and feeling. They used long metaphors and analogies to engineering, physics or information technology, and so were not only losing their spouse, but also both of us! Using as clear and short a path through what you observed, thought, feel and need as you can to make your request. The simplest and most straightforward way is the best.

The last and final step to Speak My Truth is to make sure that our spouse was able to understand it. Hearing back from our spouse something that resembles what it is that we are trying to say can help us feel like they really understood it and “got” us. That kind of “reflecting” what we are speaking is nearly impossible if we are not being brief. We encourage couples to speak no more than two sentences at a time, and then pause, specifically to see if your spouse was able to get what you were saying. Speaking My Truth in brief statements of only one or two sentences provides for better comprehension by our spouse. It also serves to keep the conversation civil and away from high levels of energy.

As we mentioned earlier in this book, it does not matter what we are trying to communicate if our spouse does not understand or “get” it. The most important thing we can do to make sure what we are sending is what they are receiving is to **Check to See if the Hearer Heard My Truth**. Checking can be as easy as pausing. This provides the hearer a chance to “reflect” our statements and ask

questions about what it is that is being said. If there is no response, use a quick prompt of “I want to make sure I’m saying what I need to say. What is it that you are hearing me say?”

On the next two pages you will find the essentials to the Speaking My Truth tool. These can and should be used over and over again to prepare and plan to speak your truth to your spouse, now and in future conversations. First you will see all of the rules for Speaking My Truth put together on one page. Next you will find a form that will guide you in planning how you can make this important tool work successfully for you and for your relationship. If you have completed this workbook as you were reading through it, you will have all of the information you need to complete this form and prepare for a successful meeting.

One Final Thought On Speaking My Truth

When making your request, be prepared to accept one of three possible answers:

YES

NO

perhaps, but only if...

Your spouse may not be ready to make the commitment to your request, or may not know how to make that commitment. Quite often, when we hear no, if we ask our spouse what they would be willing to do to help with the issue, we find that they can come up with something that will work better for both spouses. Speak Your Truth knowing full well that you might not reach a solution in the first meeting on the issue. Best wishes for success!

Speaking My Truth

Request/Check for Attention. Stick to One Subject.

Speak from the “I.”

Speak from My Experience. I saw ...

I thought...

I felt....

I believe...

I want...

Say What I Need to Say.

Own My Thoughts, Feelings and Assumptions. Be Specific and Brief.

Check to See if Hearer Heard My Truth.

Speaking My Truth Plan

Is this a good time for us to talk (if not, when)? _____

When you _____

I want to make sure I am saying what I need to say. What is it that you are hearing me say?

If your spouse isn't getting it, restate it more specifically and briefly until they get it.

I think _____

Check for Hearing

I feel _____

Check for Hearing

I am thankful for you listening to me about this important issue.

Check for Hearing

I am asking or requesting that you...

Check for Hearing

If you say yes to this request I will think and feel...

Check for Hearing and Wait for Answer.

Chapter Two: Hearing the Truth

As we discussed at the beginning of the last chapter, change is difficult. You will find challenges in implementing a new way of interacting with each other over the issues that cause you and your spouse so much pain. It is normal for you to struggle with the change, and in fact it can be even more difficult to make the change stick.

You did not always know how to tie your shoelaces. In fact, there was a time when you did not know that you did not know how to tie your shoelaces. You were fine with not tying shoelaces. You were **unconsciously incompetent** at tying shoelaces.

One day you realized, perhaps watching another child tie his own shoelaces, that you did not know how to tie your shoelaces. You became uncomfortable that you did not know to tie your shoelaces, so you began trying to learn to tie your shoelaces. At that moment you were **consciously incompetent** in tying shoelaces.

You began working with your mother, or perhaps an older sibling or other adult, to learn to tie your shoelaces. There were times as you attempted to tie your shoelaces that you became very frustrated, and maybe even cried. But you were motivated, and you stayed with it. You purposefully had to think about every part of the shoelace-tying process to successfully tie your shoelaces. Sometimes you made several attempts to successfully tie your shoelaces, and you

were eventually able to tie your shoelaces every single time. During this period, you were **consciously competent** in tying shoelaces.

Today you are able to tie your shoelaces while watching a television program and carrying on a conversation with a friend by phone at the same time. You may not even remember tying your shoelaces, even though the evidence exists that you did. You do not have to think through it anymore. Now, you are unconsciously competent in tying shoelaces.

The skills we are teaching you, to Speak and Hear Truth, are new skills. You probably moved from being **unconsciously incompetent to consciously incompetent** before you purchased this book. You knew you did not know something that you needed to know, and you wanted to know how to do something that you saw other people in successful relationships doing.

Now you are in the period of becoming consciously competent. This period is difficult, because it takes energy and attention to detail to try and try again to become competent in this new skill. It will be hard, but very much worth it. What is awesome about this learning process is that if you keep practicing it, there will come a day when you are unconsciously competent, and you will practice these skills without thinking about it!

We want to encourage you to use the prompts in this book over and over again until the skills of Speaking and Hearing Truth become second nature to you. You will have a stronger, deeper, and more committed marriage, because you will be able to talk about any issue with your spouse in a way that focuses on resolution of the problems and your future

together. We have witnessed couples using these skills to work through issues including money, sex, parenting, in-laws, recreation, chores, faith, and other areas.

In the last chapter we focused on the skill of speaking my truth in such a way that our spouse hears us. In this chapter we are focusing on hearing our spouse's truth. Hearing the Truth is not the same as "just listening." Hearing the Truth is a very specific way of listening that focuses on trying to understand the story your spouse is telling him or herself about a specific situation and communicating what you have been told back to your spouse in order to verify that you received the information correctly



We have come to believe that each person has a movie playing in their head that is directed by, produced by, and stars themselves. The reason the movie is focused entirely

on them is because it is the film and tapes of their life story. In his movie, all of his earliest memories are there, starting from his family interactions in childhood and including what he experienced in his earliest dating years. It includes all of his hopes, dreams, world views, and beliefs, including his greatest joys and greatest fears. It also documents his relationship with his spouse from its very beginning.

His wife also has a movie, one that is directed by, produced by, and stars herself. The only way they can see each other's movies is if they invite the other in for a view. By practicing these rules for hearing truth, each spouse will be able to see the other's movie. In viewing the spouse's movie, he/she will be able to understand better why it is that the spouse is saying or doing what they are. You will not have to wonder any more. And when you hear the truth of your spouse, he or she will be more motivated to come see the movie playing in your head, to hear your truth.

Chris and Julie came to see us because they felt like they were living in the same home but were really not connected to each other. As very active young professionals beginning successful careers, they were not always in their home together every night. When they did happen to be at home at the same time, very often they had both already eaten dinner with business associates before they arrived home for the evening. As they began explaining their issues, both pulled out their phones and other devices to share the record of their conversations.

As we listened, it became apparent to us that Chris and Julie hardly ever spoke more than a few words to each other. Most of their conversations about household decisions, schedules, and so on occurred by text or email. Even when they were sitting in the same room, they were frequently on their phones or other devices instead of looking at each other. No

wonder their marriage felt so alone!

And that is a good place to begin. Hearing the Truth begins with **Showing Full Body Attention**. Full body attention is not a military salute, but rather a physical turning and fully facing our spouse. It includes turning off our cell phone and other electronic devices, pausing or turning off the TV program, making direct eye contact, and moving close (within arm's reach) to our spouse.

We recommend actually sitting in moveable chairs so that the chairs can be strategically placed in the formation we call the “Couples Communication Chairs.” It is a very specific chair placement that elicits full body attention. It also is an easy way for each spouse to know that they are about to use the Speaking and Hearing Truth rules. Here's a picture of antique chairs that were designed and sold as “courting chairs” in prior generations.



What is cool about this chair placement is that it has been around for a long time. You can still find “courting chairs” in antique stores and in vintage hotels and bed and breakfasts. The courting chairs were made so that a couple

could look directly into each other's eyes and have close face to face contact, while at the same time being off-centered enough to not seem like a confrontation or a threat to either party. When sitting in the Couples Communication Chairs, you will notice that either party can stand up and leave the conversation or move away from the spouse without upsetting anything.

In our experience working with hundreds of couples at events, it has been amazing to see couples in struggle be able to sit in this configuration and work things out. They have shared how they were able to have the conversation they never thought was possible because of this configuration and the Speaking and Hearing Truth rules. We have seen tears and angry facial expressions turn to affectionate touching, hugging and kissing. We encourage you to use the Couples Communication Chairs and always Show Full Body Attention.

Stop for a few minutes and think through the following prompts to help you understand better what is needed to show full body attention.

How I Know My Spouse Is Truly Listening To Me:

As we said earlier, one of the most frustrating things in a relationship is when a person is not listening to us. Instead of listening it seems like they are just focusing on their next point in our argument. They focus on our words only long enough to find words that can be turned around on us. They interrupt so that we never are able to finish our thought or sentence. They do not seem to care about what we are trying to say.

One of the first sessions with one of the first couples we ever

worked with was with a couple who had been married for about fifteen years. We remember them because we did not do a very good job helping them. We were in our mid 20s and were amazed at the response we received after asking them what was going on.

Each took turns telling all about how horrible the other person was. In fact, sometimes they did not take turns, they simply interrupted each other. Neither spouse was talking to the other directly; both were talking to us, but communicating put-downs to each other. It was a perfect example of how they were communicating in their home, and a horrible example of what happens to conversations about issues when couples do not use the skills taught in this book!

The purpose of Hearing the Truth is so that we will **Focus on Hearing in Order to Reflect**. If our objective is to really understand and “get” our spouse in order to resolve the challenge that is causing pain in our relationship, we will need to focus our attention on only one thing. We will need to focus only on what is being said, and not focus on our interpretation of what is being said or on rebuttals.

During the process of Speaking and Hearing the Truth, we will have our chance to Speak My Truth but only after we have heard our spouse’s Truth, including any requests that have been made for our consideration. There is an old saying attributed to a number of authors, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood”. During our turn as the Hearer, it is important for us to focus on understanding.

Hopefully the following will help you better understand this important and crucial concept to hearing your spouse’s truth.

What I Am Willing To Do To Show Full Body Attention:

Focus On Hearing In Order to Reflect

Spouse says, “You know the other day, when you forgot to pick up the kids from school and they had to stand out in the rain for hours waiting on you?”

Incorrect Hearing Truth Responses

“I wasn’t any more late than you were that day when you left them at soccer practice and we had to go get them from the coach.”

“I was only 15 minutes late.”

“They weren’t in the rain. They were standing on the porch out of the rain with other kids whose parents were late.”

“I didn’t forget to pick them up. Traffic was just so bad I couldn’t get there right when the school bell rang.”

Correct Hearing Truth Responses

“What I hear you saying is that you remember I didn’t pick the kids up from school the day it was raining.”

“It sounds like you are checking to see if I remember the time that I didn’t pick the kids up in a timely manner.”

“Am I hearing you correctly that you want me to remember the time the kids had to wait on me to pick them up the day it rained really hard?”

One of the ways we can show our understanding, in addition to showing full body attention and listening in order to reflect, is to **Reflect What is Being Said**. Reflecting what is being said is nothing more than sharing

what it is we are hearing. It is being a mirror and giving the words back to the speaker as best you understand them.

You have probably attended a sporting, music or other event sometime in your life where your ticket of admission is exchanged for a stamp on your hand. The stamp is the evidence that you had the ticket. It is the proof that you need to move on. Our reflection is like giving our spouse a stamp for what they said. A stamp serves as proof that we have been checked out and approved for re-entry. It states nothing specific, no judgments. By giving their words back to them they are able to “see” what it is they are saying and to check to see if that is really what they are trying to say.

It’s a way of giving them a stamp showing that you got what it was they were saying and that you are ready to move forward. We are checking to see if the truth they are trying to communicate is what you are receiving.

We do that by repeating or rephrasing what they are saying. Occasionally, we might even paraphrase what is being said like a summary statement. We do not add what our opinion is about what has just been said or whether we agree or do not agree with what is being said. We simply restate to the speaker what we heard them just say.

We hope you find the following helpful in helping you think through how to reflect what is being said by your spouse.

How to Reflect What is Being Said

What I hear you saying is...

It sounds like you...

What it seems like you are saying is...

I'm wondering if you are saying...

Let's see if I understand what you are saying, you're saying... What it sounds like you are saying is...

It seems that you are saying...

Sometimes what is being communicated may not make sense to us. We may have some challenge with understanding what is being shared. In such cases, it is always important to **Curiously Ask for Clarification**. Both parts of this rule -- being curious, and focusing on clarification -- are equally important.

When we are focused on reflecting, we may have an opinion pop up that is in line with a story we have been telling ourselves about our spouse's motives, thoughts, or feelings. Until we are able to master setting that aside and only asking a question for clarification purposes, we will tend to head back down the path of past arguments. When we ask a question, the purpose should not be for building a case for what we will say when it is our turn to Speak My Truth. We should not focus on asking questions to catch our spouse in a conundrum. Our sole purpose of asking a question should be so that we can adequately reflect in their words what it is they are saying. Our job is to discern what it is they are trying to tell us.

There are many ways to seek the same information. When Hearing the Truth, it is important to refrain from acting like a CIA interrogator or investigative reporter. Try to avoid asking questions in an effort to catch them. We're not interrogating our spouse for information they are trying to withhold! Instead, our questions should be posed in the curious nature of a young child. Asking questions in a curious nature will help keep the tone positive.

The Difference between Curious and Investigative Approaches

Interrogations:

Extract Confession Dig around for

Dig up

Examine

Nose around for

Test

Engagement

Curious Conversation:

Interview

Consult with

Discussion

Audition

Conference

Engagement

Roy's father loves jokes. He tells a story about a couple who went to their minister for counseling. She spoke for the first thirty minutes telling all the problems in their relationship. She was frustrated that he spent most of his time away from the house and when he was in the house he hardly said anything. When the wife paused for a second to take a breath, the minister briefly interrupted and asked him why it is that

he never spoke to her. The wife answered this question and continued with the list of things that he did not do well. When she paused again, the minister asked her to remain quiet for a couple of minutes and asked him for his side of the story. He replied in a slow steady voice, “I was taught to never interrupt a lady. I’ll be glad to talk when I’m given the chance without interrupting.”

It is impossible to share what you need to share if every sentence or two you are interrupted. It is just as true for your spouse! When you are attempting to hear the Truth it is vital that you **Refrain from Reacting or Interrupting**. You may have heard the saying, “God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason. We should listen twice as much as we talk!” Hearing means we are not responding. While we are attempting to Hear the Truth, we must put aside all of our urges to react or interrupt and save them for when it is our turn to Speak My Truth.

Take the next several minutes and think through the following prompts to help you focus on how to implement this important skill.

Strategies I Can Employ In Order to Not Interrupt:

What I Can Ask My Spouse To Do When I Interrupt:

While attempting to Hear the Truth, we must **Affirm Their Right to Their Thoughts and Feelings**. Whatever is being shared may be so different from how you view reality that you really believe you are not only from different cultures and countries, but from different planets! What is being said when they are Speaking their Truth is not up for debate. Their truth is just that, theirs. Their truth will be different from your truth. This is why the Speaking and Hearing the Truth rules have been developed, and why you are using this book.

Dale and Lacie were in their late 50s and the seventh year of their second marriages. Lacie sat across from us during a Marriage Intensive marathon coaching session with us and told us how she feels like “I just don’t matter to him.” She told us how he had told her before they were married that they would travel the world in the next year after he sold his business. Seven years later, he had still not sold his business and they had only traveled in the US twice since they married. She said, “I feel so stupid. If he really loved me like he said he did, he would have sold his business and we would be enjoying each other as we travel.”

Dale reported that Lacie was just wrong. “Lacie, you have no right to feel like that! I have never told you that you are stupid and I love you today just as much as I did when I was planning to sell my business.” Dale just could not accept that Lacie could have feelings of not being loved and being made a fool. His refusal to accept whatever feelings Lacie was expressing as her own feelings was standing in the way of their ability to move from a place of being stuck to a pathway to resolution.

You will be stuck like Dale if you want to focus on how you

are right and how your spouse is wrong, or if you want to judge what was said instead of accepting it as the movie playing in their head about the incident.

Your judgment about their Truth, thoughts, and feelings is not important during your turn to Hear the Truth. What is important is that you seek to understand what it is that is being communicated and affirm that they have the right to their thoughts and feelings. For some of you, it may be better for you to see it written here: **Let your spouse have the right to be wrong.**

Chances are that you will need that grace at some time as well, so let them feel what they feel and think what they think. Give your spouse room to express it. Hear it and reflect it. After the request is made of you, and when it is your turn to Speak the Truth, you can share your view within the Speaking and Hearing Truth rules.

Following you will find a chart that incorporates all the rules of Hearing Your Spouse's Truth. Practice, practice, practice! Remember that it will be difficult to move from Consciously Competent to Unconsciously Competent. If you stay with it, the reward will be a deepened relationship and a more committed marriage, and you will be able to use the skills as second nature, without having to think about it.

Wishing you the best in seeking to understand, then to be understood!

Hearing Another's Truth

Show Full Body Attention.

Focus on Hearing in Order to Reflect.

Reflect What Is Being Said.

Curiously Ask For Clarification, if Needed.

Refrain From Reacting or Interrupting.

Affirm Their Right to Their Thoughts/Feelings.



Chapter Three: When You Are Too Upset to Talk

You may be asking yourself how Speaking and Hearing Truth works when one or both of you are so upset that you can hardly talk without yelling. I want to tell you that there is no way that Speaking and Hearing Truth works while you are emotionally triggered.

Let me share a story that will help bring this point home. Several years ago we had some work contracted on our bathroom which resulted in our “dilly- dobber” being stuck in the up position. The dilly-dobber, as we called it, is the knob you pull up in the shower/bathtub to cause water to spout from the shower head. Our dilly-dobber would stay up as we turned off the shower.

Devra has always been a bath person. Roy is clean but does not take baths. One morning Roy rose early to begin his day and, as was his morning routine, he turned on the bathwater to begin to move the hot water to that part of the house. As he turned it on, he was surprised by being hit in the back of the head by a stream of cold water!

It was obvious that whoever had taken a shower last had not turned the dilly-dobber down when they finished. So Roy continued to prepare for his morning, and later in the day he had a conversation with Devra that went something like this:

Roy: You’re not going to believe what happened to me this morning. I turned the water on to get the hot water to the

shower while I shaved and I was hit in the back of the head by a stream of cold water!

Devra: Oh, no! That must have really been quite a surprise.

Roy: Yep. I don't know if you know it but the little dilly-dobber that diverts the water from the bath nozzle to the shower head sticks. In other words, when you turn off the shower it doesn't automatically turn down.

Devra: Oh, I didn't know that. I took a bath last night and I am so sorry. I'll do my best to put the dilly-dobber down next time I take a shower.

Roy: Thank you so very much. I love you!

Devra: I love you, Baby!

A couple of days later, as Roy began his morning routine he was surprised as he was hit in the back of the head again with a stream of cold water. Knowing what probably happened, he decided to catch up with Devra later in the day, and the conversation went something like this:

Roy: Hey Hon, guess how I started my day today?

Devra: I don't know. How?

Roy: I got hit in the back of the head with a cold stream of water again!

Devra: Oh, my! I am so sorry! I guess I forgot to put the dilly-dobber down again. I don't take many showers, and I am so sorry I forgot.

Roy: I'm requesting that you do your best to put the dilly-dobber down. When the dilly-dobber is left up, I feel like

you might have had other things on your mind and just forgot my request. Until we get a plumber over to fix it, please push the dilly-dobber down when you turn the water off from your shower.

Devra: Babe, you know I'll do my best.

About two weeks later, on the coldest January morning of the year, Roy turned the water on and was once again blasted in the back of the head with freezing cold water. The physical sensation caused immediate loss of breath and trembling which dissipated as the water was dried off; but the emotional trigger of this event lasted the rest of the day.

Roy was emotionally triggered. Initially he felt anger. He was quickly having thoughts like: How could she do this to me? She knows how this affects me! She doesn't care if I get hit in the back of the head with cold water. In fact, I don't think she really cares for me at all! If she really loved and cared for me, she would make sure to put the dilly-dobber down. I would never do anything like this to her!

Isn't it interesting that Roy was feeling that way, even after all his formal training in psychology? He knew that Devra loved him. However, the part of his brain that knew Devra loved him was not working well at that moment. The part of the brain that felt like she did not love him was running the show at the time.

Why do we get triggered?

You may remember that all sensory input... all we taste, smell, touch, see, and hear travels through sensory nerves to the spinal cord and into the brain stem. Between the frontal lobes, the thinking part of our brain, and our brain stem is a group of brain structures known as the limbic system, the emotional part of our brain.

The data that we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch is felt first. As it travels through the feeling part of our brain, our feeling memories are triggered... that's why when we smell certain smells we automatically begin to feel great and remember our grandmother's favorite recipe of our favorite dish.

Then it travels to the thinking part of our brain where we interpret what is sent from the feeling part of our brain. The thinking part of the brain processes it with a number of high cognitive functions to judge and define what it is that we just experienced. What feels like "just the facts" usually includes feelings and many judgments or opinions about what we just experienced.

Researchers have known for a couple of decades now that when we interpret a threat, some risk to our well-being, the feeling part of our brain is triggered. Neurotransmitters and hormones are activated for the purpose of keeping us safe. As the chemicals are dumped into our brain and body, we are prepared to react. Our body is triggered into Fight, Flight, or Freeze mode.

When we are triggered, we are capable of achieving more than if we were not triggered. A 95 pound triggered mother can pick a car up off of her baby. A scared child can run faster than usual away from a scary person. Having this system of being triggered is actually good for us!

As we are triggered, the beats-per-minute of our heart rises swiftly and our palms start to sweat. The feeling part of our brain's activity level and the pings between nerve cells are several hundred times faster than the thinking part of our brain. We are literally feeling hundreds of times faster than we are thinking.

Unfortunately, we end up not thinking well. Our cognitive abilities are so impaired that an hour after being triggered we

may be regretful for what we have said or done.

That is why Speaking and Hearing the Truth does not work when you are emotionally triggered. In the emotional moment, we are not thinking well enough to have a conversation focused on resolving the issue. Instead we tend to be focused on how we can prove the other person wrong. Or worse, we try to hurt them, in such a way that we feel satisfied that they have experienced the same level of pain or more.

Richard and Barbara attended one of our Life Together Forever Weekends. During one of the breaks, Richard approached Roy to tell him that he can never talk over an issue with Barbara. Any time he begins to talk to her about an issue with finances, a chore or parenting, she leaves the room. When he follows her, she storms out of the house, slams the door, and peels out as she leaves the home's driveway.

The next exercise in the weekend was an exercise where each person identified what triggers them and what they do with they are triggered. When we checked with the couple during the exercise, they both had tears in their eyes realizing how much this had affected their marriage er forty years.

Realizing what actions trigger you and how you handle it is the first huge step in developing a way to move forward. What do you do when you are triggered but you need to solve the issue? We have found through our own experience and through the experience of working with thousands of couples that we need to find a way to separate and cool down. Cooling down helps us calm ourselves and allow the thinking part of our brain to catch up to the feeling part of our brain. We call it a Time Out.

Time Out Rules

Like the Speaking and Hearing Truth Rules, we have found that the Time Out process works best when both spouses agree and follow the same rules. Here are the important rules for successfully calling a Time Out.

Request a Time Out if Emotional Energy Is Increasing

It does not matter who notices it first or whether it is happening within you or your spouse, you need to call a time out as the energy begins to rise. Like cancer, early detection can lead to successful outcomes, so as soon as you see it in your partner or feel it within yourself, call a Time Out.

It is most often the person who is not triggered who first notices the need for a Time Out. The person who is triggered can be blind to what is happening. Perhaps you have overheard a screaming argument where one spouse tells the other, “I’m not yelling. I’m just raising my voice! You want to hear how it sounds when I’m yelling at you?”

If you or your spouse are seeing or sensing any of the following, it might be a good time to call a Time Out.

Facial expressions are primarily tense.

Eye movement is more rapid.

Pace and tone of speech changes.

Volume of speaking increases.

Sweating (palms, head)

Increased energy and movement.

Take a couple of minutes now to answer the following questions that will help you better understand when to call a time out.

How Can You Tell That You Are Triggered:

How Can You Tell when your Spouse is Triggered:

Communicate the Request for a Time Out

If you are sensing a need for a Time Out, it is important to communicate that you are calling a Time Out. Walking away, leaving the room, slamming the door, getting in your car and driving away, are not signs that you are calling a Time Out. Instead they are destructive behaviors that usually keep the issue from being resolved, leading to another blow-up in the future.

In the story of Richard and Barbara above, Richard never knew if and when Barbara would be returning. Sometimes her slamming doors and driving off kept them from resolving the issue. Unresolved issues will continue to repeat until they either tear the marriage apart or become resolved. The only way to discuss the issue is when neither of you are triggered.

Unless you or your children's safety is at risk, do not just leave the room/premises. Instead communicate that you are sensing the need for a time out so that both of you know that you are invoking this process.

How you request Time Out is something that you and your spouse should negotiate together. We sometimes use the actual “Time Out” sign used in professional sports, crossing our hands in such a way as to form a “T”. We also will say something like, “It’s starting to feel like we may need a Time Out. Can we take a Time Out?” Take a minute or two to think this through and make a decision about how the ways that would be best received by either of you to communicate the need for a time out.

How Will You And Your Spouse Communicate The Need For A Time Out?

State an Estimated Time to Continue the Discussion

The most important reason for calling Time Out is so that we can give each spouse time to move from the feeling part of the brain to the thinking part of the brain. If we can take some time to become calm again, we reactivate our ability to make good decisions and think through issues. We give ourselves and our spouse a chance to solve the issue once and for all by using our Speaking and Hearing Truth process.

It is essential that when we call Time Out we negotiate with our spouse the time that we will re-engage the issue that needs resolution. We need to have enough time to calm down, but not so much time that we forget what the issue was!

Researchers are mixed about how long it takes to calm down once triggered. Early detection of becoming triggered reduces the overall amount of time until calm returns. We like to recommend at least 15 to 20 minutes but not more than twenty-four hours.

There are as many different ways to calm down as there are people in the world. Some people calm down listening to music, while others enjoy silent prayer or meditation. Some want to be active and take a walk or run. Others enjoy doing chores. Others want to sit still and be alone. Try to find something that you can do to help calm you down. Putting chemicals in your body, like alcohol or other drugs, is not helpful for moving from a triggered state to a state of problem solving.

One of the easiest things to do to calm yourself is to practice controlled breathing. When we are triggered, we usually have shallow, fast breathing. When we begin to focus on our breathing, we notice the pace of our breathing and in turn become able to slow it down. Taking slow, deep breaths helps change our body's trigger reaction. This helps our thinking abilities to improve. So, oxygenate – breathe!

We remember working with one couple, both of whom de-escalated and calmed down when they accomplished -- work! When a time out was called, each party would go full blast into their chores. The physical activity burned off the energy their body received from the triggering incident. When they got back together to discuss the issue, they both felt so good about what they had accomplished that it helped them move forward in a way that was focused on their future together.

Use the next several minutes to work through the following questions to help you and your spouse know how to successfully soothe and calm yourselves during a time out.

What Are Several Options You Could Employ To Calm Yourself?

What Helps Your Spouse Calm Down?

Communicating a time to get back together is important. Give each spouse time to become calm so that you may reconvene to solve the issue. Sometimes we communicate a specific amount of time until we will get back together. For instance, “Ok, I agree that Time Out is needed, and I suggest we get back together in 30 minutes.” Sometimes we communicate a specific time, almost like setting an appointment. For instance, “Can we get back together to talk about this at 6PM?” But usually we choose a specific thing that will happen before we get back together about it. For instance, “Yes, let’s talk about this after we get the chores done and the kids to bed.” Or perhaps, “Great! Can we get up 30 minutes earlier tomorrow and talk about this in the morning? I really feel my energy draining, and I don’t think I’ll be able to think clearly about this till I get some rest.”

As you move your focus from the issue to scheduling a time to get back together, you will probably notice an immediate feeling of relief. The small activity of agreeing upon when we will be getting back together to solve this issue can calm each of the parties. So negotiate together when you will be reconvening, and make sure that you are both on the same page about it.

Return to Conversation as Scheduled

It is important for both parties to get together at the time that was established when Time Out was initially called. Now, occasionally one or both spouses will not be ready to reconvene at the time that was scheduled; usually it is because one or both spouses are unable to calm down enough to be focused on resolving the issue.

In those cases, we encourage a brief engagement at the agreed-upon time for the purpose of negotiating another time to have a conversation. Return to face each other as agreed,

even though you are not ready to solve the issue yet; but do not pursue solving the problem. Instead, schedule when you will be getting back together again. For instance, “Honey, I thought I would be ready, but I think I’m still pretty mad and I’m not ready to do this yet. Can we get back together in about an hour?”

No Talking About Subject Until Scheduled

Time Out is a break from the emotionally triggering issue. It is an attempt to hit the “reset button” for the discussion about the issue. It is a way to pause the conversation long enough for the thinking part of our brain to catch up with the feeling part of our brain, so we can employ the Speaking and Hearing Truth process and move toward resolution.

Linda and Donald were in an on-again, off-again relationship. They were attending one of our Life Together Forever Weekends and had listed their relationship as “Seriously Dating”. During a break, Linda told us that they had tried a time out in the past but that Donald just won’t leave the issue alone. He will follow her wherever she goes throughout the house. She reported that she sometimes refuses to look at him or talk to him when he is following her around the house but that he continues to try to engage her in the argument.

Of course, Donald and Linda were not practicing the Time Out Rules together. During the weekend, we helped him develop some specific activities that he could immediately do to move him away from the triggering argument and help him calm down. Linda agreed to return to the conversation at the appropriate time, even if it was just long enough for them to reschedule the issue-solving conversation.

During Time Out, neither spouse should attempt to engage

the other about the issue that the Time Out is called about. The Time Out is a Time Out about that issue, so bringing it back up once the Time Out is called and before you have agreed to meet back together is actually harmful to getting the issue resolved. It defeats the purpose of the Time Out! Leave the issue out of the conversation as much as possible.

Communication About Other Things Continues During Time Out

Time Out is not a break from life. Life goes on. Children still need to be picked up from school. Arrangements still need to be made for dinner tonight. We still need to work out tonight and tomorrow's family schedule.

There are differences between "The Silent Treatment" and Time Out. The Silent Treatment does not have a scheduled time to re-engage for resolution. The Silent Treatment is used to somehow "punish" the person who is being isolated. In the mind of the person administering The Silent Treatment is the belief that by withholding words they are causing pain to their target. I have found that the spouse being targeted by The Silent Treatment usually feels relief that their spouse is giving them a break and not talking to them!

Time Out means that we are only taking a break about the triggering issue. It does not require the parties not to be in the vicinity of each other. It does require that communication continue about other household management issues, such as transportation, meal planning, chores, and so on. You can talk about anything that is not a triggering issue during Time Out. Speak to each other about important things that cannot wait until Time Out is over, as long as they are not triggering the subject that caused the tension.

We encourage you to learn and practice Time Out Skills if either spouse is becoming triggered. When you re-engage each other, focus on using the Speaking and Hearing Truth Skills in order to achieve issue resolution and move forward together. By using these skills, you will improve your marriage commitment and strengthen your intimacy with each other.

If I Need To Take A Time Out But The Other Person Has Not Read This Book

When we teach Time Out in our conferences, inevitably someone will raise a hand and ask how they can teach their horrible boss or frustrating coworker to use Time Out. Roy teaches corporate teams, small businesses, churches and other groups these same communication techniques for maximum productivity within teams. These communication tools work in relationships with children, employees, supervisors, neighbors, group members, etc.

You can take Time Out when no one else in the conversation has a clue about it! You do not have to necessarily call it a Time Out. Roy likes to tell a story about his use of this technique early in his career.

“I was running one of the largest family-serving nonprofits in Texas and it was going through some considerable changes. One of our coworkers seemed especially able to push the buttons of the other Senior Leaders, including me! During one such meeting, she had several of us “triggered” at the same time, because she was taking credit for something that we knew she did not do! I wanted to take a Time Out so that I could think about the best approach to dealing with her and the other members. I requested a break by saying, ‘I know this is a very important discussion and I don’t want to miss it. But nature is calling, and I need to

leave the room. Can we take a 10 or 15 minute break and reconvene?’ During the break, I was able to step outside and take a few breaths as well as visit the restroom for some quiet time. When we reconvened, it seemed that people on our team had a better handle on their own emotions and the meeting proceeded without any big flare-ups.”

You do not have to teach others what a Time Out is, nor do you have to call it a Time Out. But find a way to take a break and calm yourself. You will be serving yourself and others well if you take advantage of such a break.

The Time Out Rules are on a page that you can print and post on your refrigerator, or keep somewhere handy in your home. Our hope is that you will implement these skills and reap the benefits of a healthier relationship.

Time Out Rules



Request a Time Out if Emotional Energy Is Increasing

Communicate the Request for a Time Out

State an Estimated Time to Continue the Discussion (No Longer Than 24 Hours)

Return to the Conversation as Scheduled

No Talking About the Subject Until Scheduled

Communication About Other Things Continues During Time Out (No Silent Treatment)

Chapter Four:

Marriage Killers

Why Some Issues Are Never Resolved

One recent study states that the average married couple disagrees about 21 times per week. Some of you are reading this with surprise, since your relationship seems to be in better shape than the average marriage; and others have just found evidence that your marriage is worse than the average marriage. Wherever you see yourself at this moment, the fact remains that disagreements inevitably occur in all marriages.

We have learned through our work with couples over the years that disagreements can occur in almost every area of the relationship. Couples disagree about sex, parenting, money, vacations, in-laws, friends, recreation, faith, major purchases, and many other matters. One couple we worked with had their longest running and largest disagreement about goats!

Cathy had always wanted to raise animals, and when she married her second husband, who had several acres in the country, she was excited to start raising animals. With his input during the first year of their marriage, they accepted a gift of six goats from a neighbor who was moving. At about the same time, his business began to take him on longer trips overseas. He was home for a week every couple of months, and at those times they would argue over how much feed was costing and why she wasn't selling or processing the goats. After twelve years, and during our first visit, she reported

that she “could never let anyone ever harm one of my pets!” The goat population on their property had grown so large that county officials had visited their goat farm to make sure that they were being properly cared for.

Do you wonder how many times they argued over goats? We believe that most couples do not have 21 disagreements a week, but rather they have three or four disagreements over and over and over again! That means that if they could resolve just one issue so that they do not have an ongoing disagreement about it, they would reduce their overall disagreements by between 25 and 33 percent!

In our experience, the reason some issues are never resolved and couples spend their entire married life arguing over them is because one or both of them are engaging in what we call “Marriage Killers”. Marriage Killers are the things we do or say that get in the way of our ability to have an argument-resolving conversation. John Gottman’s groundbreaking marriage research revealed that these Marriage Killers are at the foundation of why marriages end.

Couples who frequently engage in Marriage Killers simply fail to resolve issues. Their continued arguments lead to a negative pattern of interacting that cancels out any positive interactions. Soon, the couple is living in the same home, but living separate, parallel lives. Lonely, and not having their relationship needs met either physically and emotionally, they begin to search outside of their marriage. The end is soon to follow, mixed with significant and challenging emotional pain.

Criticism

Criticism is one of the most obvious of all of the Marriage Killers. Criticism is communicating that something is wrong with the other person. You can choose to communicate your desire for a different behavior from your spouse in a way that brings you closer together, or you can choose to communicate your desire for a different behavior from your spouse in a way that tears you apart.



Criticism goes beyond communicating a request that you have for your spouse's behavior change. It goes into language about your spouse's character, identity, family, and so on. Criticism is putting down your spouse and finding fault. This is often associated with assuming the worst about their intentions.

Complaint:

“I noticed that you did not close the lid to the trash can when you took out the trash; you left the lid up. I'm afraid an animal will get in there and make a mess. Will you please put the lid down on the trash can when you take out the trash?”

Criticism:

“You never take out the trash but when you do you always leave the lid up. You are such a lazy, uncaring person. You don't give a flip that I will have to clean everything up when an animal gets in there. Can't you ever do anything right?”

Complaints focus only on the behavior that you are requesting to be changed. Criticism focuses on the worst possible attributes of the person whose behavior you are requesting be changed. Complaints focus on resolution with a request. Criticism focuses on making the other person feel bad for what they have done or failed to do.

Criticism usually begins very harshly, and usually begins with the word “you”. Criticism exaggerates: “You never”, “you always” and “this is the thousandth time...”. Criticism frequently includes a higher level of energy and may include a raised volume of voice and demonstrative body motion.

Criticism is a Marriage Killer because it often leads to limited or no communication about the issue. The issue recurs, over and over, and remains unresolved. A pattern of negative interactions soon sets in, and communication comes to a halt. Before long, hurt feelings and lack of engagement lead to the couple living lonely, parallel lives. The end is near.

What You Can Do About Criticism

If you are on the receiving end of criticism, it is easiest in the moment to withdraw, to become defensive, or to reciprocate the criticism. None of those responses move toward resolution. They may feel good in the moment, but they move us away from our goal of life together forever in a happy home.

If we listen closely enough and do not react, we can usually hear in the criticism something that sounds like a reasonable request. By focusing on the reasonable request within the criticism, instead of focusing on how it was said, we can move toward resolution by turning the conversation toward the real issue.

Let me share an example. Let's say one spouse angrily says, "You are so mean. You knew I was going to have to drive my car to work this morning. You didn't even have the courtesy to put gas in it when you drove it home last night. You are such a jerk."

You can choose to focus on the name calling and the way it was stated, or you can hear the reasonable request within the criticism. You might say, "Oh, my goodness, I am so sorry for not noticing the gas gauge when I drove your car home last night. I will do my best to pay attention to the gas gauge in the future when I drive your car. I did not intentionally leave you with your car out of gas. I'm sorry." By focusing on the reasonable request, we can often disarm our critic and solve the issue at hand.

If you are usually the critic, you have the most power to change your employment of this Marriage Killer. There are a couple of things you can do that we have found helpful for critical spouses.

Most critics do not realize just how critical they are. Some do not know that they are being critical at all! The first thing you can do is keep track of how often you are being critical. Your critical nature and view of your spouse (and perhaps your life) is probably getting in the way of the things you really strive toward. If you can get a better handle on your criticism, you can reach more of your goals and have a happier life.

Notice your thought before you say anything. If you can catch your thought before you speak it, you have a great chance to change the outcome. Having really high analytical skills can be very helpful for certain jobs, but in a relationship, it can lead to constant criticism.

Try pointing your analytical skills toward the positive things

your spouse is doing. Communicate what they are doing that is working so well or for which you are thankful. Tell your spouse what you like and/or love about them and what they do. Catch them doing it right and tell them how well they did it!

Most importantly, if you notice your thought and you have not yet said anything, put it into the “Complaint Formula” and speak it to your spouse in a way that focuses on resolution. Take several minutes to try out the complaint formula on something you want your spouse to change.

The Complaint Formula

When you..... (describe what they did or did not do)

I think/feel..... (describe how what they did impacted you)

I request..... (state specific behavior change you desire from your spouse)

By focusing on the behavior that you want changed, you are more likely to be heard. By specifically asking for the change you desire, you are focusing on resolving the issue. Your spouse is more likely to want to change the behavior, even if it takes reminding them several times through this same process.

Stonewalling

Stonewalling is another of the Marriage Killers. Stonewalling is just what it sounds like -- anything we do that is building a stone wall between us and our spouse. Stonewalling means refusing to communicate or cooperate.



Stonewalling is common, although it takes many different forms. It can be slamming the door as you walk out of the room or peeling out as you leave the driveway. It can be using the “silent treatment” to be present and talk to everyone else except the person with whom you are upset. It can look like diving into a book, your cell phone, or an electronic device like an iPad or laptop, or television. It can also look like hiding out in the “man- cave,” working late, or doing a lot of household chores.

Stonewalling is placing something between you and your spouse for the purpose of getting away or distancing yourself from them. Stonewalling is a Marriage Killer because we cannot solve the issue if we cannot talk about the issue. The more we do not talk about the issue, the more it recurs and the more negative interactions we have. Eventually, the negative interactions overcome any and all positive interactions. We begin distancing ourselves until we are, again, living parallel lives. The end is soon near.

What You Can Do About Stonewalling

Stonewalling is about creating some space. Usually a spouse who stonewalls does so because they are triggered and it is perceived as the lesser of two evils. In other words, they are

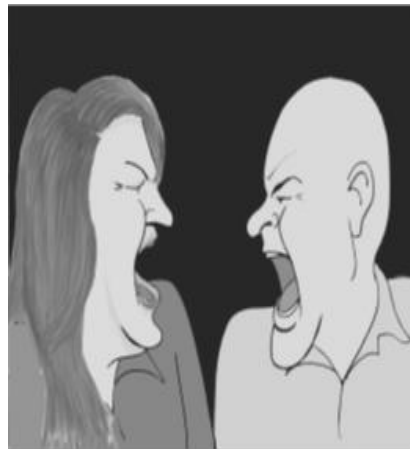
attempting to stay away from their spouse and stonewall instead of lash out.

If you are the victim of stonewalling, you are likely to be doing something that is triggering your spouse. Criticism is one of the things that often triggers stonewalling. If you notice that your spouse is stonewalling, make it safe to connect by using your Speaking and Hearing Truth skills; instead of criticizing, employ the Complaint Formula. When that does not work, use the Crucial Conversation skills that we will teach you in the next chapter.

If you notice that you are the spouse who stonewalls, try using Time Outs instead. Following the Time Out rules, notice that you are being triggered and request a Time Out focused on when (in the next 24 hours) you and your spouse can speak calmly about the issue that triggered you. Using Time Out keeps your spouse from wondering if the issue will ever be addressed, and it also lets them know that you care enough about your marriage to have the issue-resolving conversation.

Defensiveness

Defensiveness is anything we use to move away from responsibility for what our spouse believes that we have done or not done. Defensiveness, as it implies, means that we perceive our spouse's words as an attack. In response (whether it was done in a respectful way or in a way that truly was an attack), we



employ defensiveness to keep from accepting responsibility.

Defensiveness can come in many forms. Stating clearly that you did not do something and listing the reasons may be defensive. Counter-accusing your spouse is defensive. A spouse might say, “I noticed that the grass needs mowing and is really getting tall. Would you mind mowing the grass today or tomorrow?” A defensive response might be, “I would have mowed the grass sooner but you said you would start putting your shoes in the closet instead of leaving them all over the house.”

Defensiveness usually moves you away from an issue-resolving conversation. This is because defensiveness keeps the issue from being resolved and contributes to its recurrence, which leads to a negative pattern of interactions. Defensiveness is a Marriage Killer because it contributes to the end of communication and the beginning of the end of the relationship.

What Can I Do About Defensiveness?

If you are the victim of defensiveness, you may be bringing the problem to your spouse in a way that they perceive as an attack on who they are as a person. It is important to bring the issue in a way that they will receive it.

Sometimes the reason for the defensive posture of your spouse may be the way the issue was brought up. If you can find a time and place that works best for the two of you to have the conversation, you will probably have a more open conversation that focuses on true resolution of the issue.

The most important thing you can do is to use language that does not encourage defensiveness. The Complaint Formula is an excellent tool to bring up an issue in such a way that is

less likely to deploy the defensiveness of your spouse. Using your Speaking and Hearing Truth skills will also help you have the issue-resolving conversation you are hoping to have.

If you are an active user of defensiveness, you are hurting your marriage. You may believe you are protecting yourself or even protecting your spouse, but using defensiveness takes an incredible toll on the relationship over time. When you are defensive, the issue is not resolved, which results in the accusation being brought back up again at a later time, inflicting more pain.

One of the first things you can do to limit your use of defensiveness is to watch the type of language you use that gets in the way of really hearing and respecting what your spouse is saying. People who use defensiveness often hear themselves using the following phrases:

“Yes, but...”

“What about when you...”

“No, that’s not 100% true...”

“I don’t think so...”

“At least I’m not...”

“I won’t accept that...”

“You are one to be talking...”

“That is ridiculous...”

“You are blowing this way out of proportion...”

When you hear yourself using such phrases, you are likely

to be using defensiveness to sidestep responsibility for the issue being raised. Instead, consider some of these phrases:

“I can see how you would feel that way...”

“The part I agree with is...”

“It makes sense that you might think that...”

“I want to give that some more thought...”

“It really isn’t what I meant but I can see how you take it that way...”

“I am listening. Tell me more about ...”

“I agree with part of what you are saying...”

The most important thing you can do is to stay in the conversation and ask yourself, “In what way can I take responsibility for my part in this issue?” Finding even one aspect that you can take responsibility for in the issue being raised provides your spouse with part of an answer to his or her request. It also provides you with power to choose a different outcome the next time you are faced with a similar decision. Accepting responsibility for your part in the issue does not mean it is all your fault; however, it does mean that you are on your way to resolving the issue.

If you find yourself wanting to bring up a counter accusation, do everything you can to prevent this. Do not bring it up in the conversation. If you need to write it down to discuss at a later time with your spouse, do that as soon as you can. Trying to have a conversation about multiple issues at the same time is rarely productive. Put it on the “to be discussed” list, not in the current conversation, and revisit it at a later date.

Contempt

Contempt is often called the worst of the four Marriage Killers. A spouse using contempt places himself in a position of power above the other spouse. The contemptuous person believes they are better, more helpful, more thoughtful, more considerate, more punctual, smarter, cleaner, neater, and so on, than their spouse.

Contempt can take the form of putdowns, “one-ups” and snarky sarcastic remarks. It can be as obvious as stating that you think the other person is useless, worthless, or disgusting, or as subtle as rolling eyes or a sigh. What the victim of contempt receives is total disrespect and scorn. They often come to



believe that their spouse not only does not like them, but perhaps actually hates them and wants bad things for them.

Contemptuousness can be delivered in a monotone quiet voice with little energy behind it. To an observer who does not understand the remark, it can look like there really is not much of a problem in the relationship -- until the person receiving the remark shows pain outwardly, by facial expressions or even by crying.

We think the reason sarcasm hurts so much and is so destructive is that the victim rarely sees it coming. If someone came at you wielding a machete or chain saw, you would at least be prepared with your defenses up or be able

to run away! But instead of coming at you with high-energy screaming to let you know they are mad, the contemptuous spouse pulls out the scalpel of sarcasm and slices with precision very painfully in the place that hurts the most.

The reason sarcasm is a Marriage Killer is because it very often leads to limited or no communication about the issue. The issue becomes recurring and remains unresolved. A pattern of negative interactions sets in, and communication comes to a halt. Before long, hurt feelings and lack of engagement lead to the couple living lonely, parallel lives. The end is near.

What You Can Do About Contemptuousness?

If you are the victim of contempt, you are likely feeling a great deal of pain concerning what was said to you and/or how it was said. As a remedy, find a way to soothe yourself and get to a point where you can actually think about the incident without being triggered. Using Time Out skills will help you get to a place where you can have a conversation about the issue.

It is important that you do two things. First, you will need to seek to understand the issue that your spouse has with you. Then, make sure you bring up the issue of how it was communicated to you – the actual contemptuousness you experienced. These two issues can sometimes happen in the same conversation, but it usually takes two separate conversations.

Find out what led to the decision to use contemptuousness. You can do so best by using your Speaking and Hearing Truth skills. Begin by stating what you saw or heard, and then ask your spouse for specifics about what the issue was that led to the comment.

If you have to, use the Broken Record Technique. Some of you may be too young to remember, but when we were growing up in the 70's, a phonograph needle would get stuck in the same groove on a broken record and replay the same short phrase over and over again until someone moved the needle to the next groove in the record.

One of the things we have seen work with someone who has been snarky and sarcastic, instead of open and specific, is the broken record technique; requesting, again and again, specifically what they would like to see happen or not happen the next time. When the answer is, "I would like you to not be so stupid", the spouse using the broken record technique would say, "and what, specifically, would you like me to do or not do?" Listening for the answer will help you get to the issue that is underlying the contemptuous behavior.

The second, and most crucially important, step a victim of contemptuousness needs to take is to use the Complaint Formula. Here they can state very clearly what they observed in the contemptuous behavior and how it affected them. From there, they can make the request for how they want to communicate about an issue in the future without the contemptuous behavior.

If you are gifted with a sarcastic tongue and you easily resort to contempt when dealing with an issue with your spouse, you are killing your marriage! Yes, you may actually have a higher IQ, be cleaner, and so on; but along with those qualities, you will likely find yourself divorced and alone; and chances are high that you will think the same of your next spouse as well.

You need to decide if you want to always be better than your spouse and compete with them -- or if you want to stay married. Life is so much richer with a long-term relationship! Having an equal partner in the marriage is a

great blessing. You get to decide if you want to have your spouse as an equal partner. You can continue to drive your marriage into divorce court with your contemptuous behavior, or you can resolve to do something different and make a change.

If you want to try to do something about it, you can begin by noticing phrases that are common with contemptuous people:

“You have never been a good spouse...”

“You men/women are all alike...”

“You are a (name calling)...”

“You are just like your...”

“I regret ever getting married to you...”

“You have no clue how to please me...”

“I know what you are thinking/going to do...”

Contemptuous behavior is hard to change. Begin by learning to think before you speak. When you notice a contemptuous thought, instead put your issue into the Complaint Formula and attempt to bring it up with your true, and specific, thoughts and feelings. Continue to work on yourself by asking, “Why do I need to be in competition or better than my spouse? What wants or needs are driving my need to think I am so much better?”

It is difficult to think so poorly of your spouse and at the same time feel appreciation. Consider looking for the positives; develop an Appreciation List of all the qualities and things you appreciate most in your spouse.

It will always be easier for you to resort to contemptuous behavior rather than face head on the issue with your spouse; but your marriage can still thrive, if you can replace your contemptuous ways with real, issue-resolving conversation.

What To Do About Marriage Killers In Your Relationship

John Gottman detailed the results of his research following over three thousand couples for more than thirty years in his book, **The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work**. His research concluded that all couples occasionally have Marriage Killers show up in the relationship. The difference between couples who stayed together and those who did not is that those who stayed together engaged in Marriage Killers less frequently and were more quick to recover from any such incidents in their marriage.

So what you do when a Marriage Killer shows up? First, be ready to deploy your Time Out skills to move you and your spouse from a state of being triggered to a state of being able to use the thinking part of your brain. Next, have the crucial conversations that are necessary to resolve the issues and keep you growing together as equal partners.

Chapter Five: Crucial Conversations

What is a Crucial Conversation?

A crucial conversation is a conversation with a high degree of probability that it will involve emotions. Some conversations do not involve emotions, and are not emotional; but when you think you might be triggered emotionally during the conversation, or when you think your spouse might be triggered, it is a crucial conversation.

It is crucial because the conversation might lead to high negative emotions which may result in damage to the relationship. It is also crucial because if there is no conversation, not resolving the issue can lead to further disengagement, which will lead to damage in the relationship.

Crucial conversations happen when spouses care enough to say what they are afraid to say, when they work through fear and run toward, and not away from, the problem they need to discuss. They are then ready to have a crucial conversation that will likely strengthen the relationship and help each other move forward in a positive way.

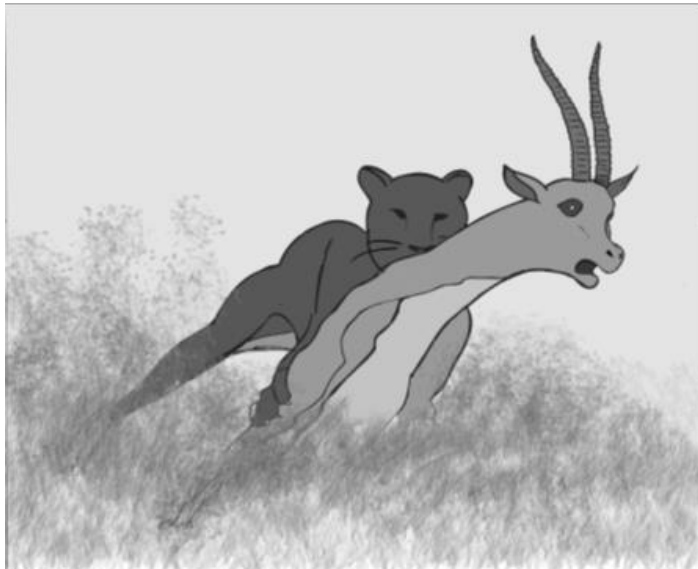
Why We Do Not Have The Conversations That Are Crucial To Our Relationship?

Success

Over the years, too many couples have called us at the 11th hour, in despair and asking for our help. Very often, when

we meet with the couple in our office for a full-day Marriage Intensive, what we learn is that they have unresolved issues that neither is willing to have a conversation about. The thing that is in their way, (usually because of one or more of the Marriage Killers) is fear. They are afraid to have any in-depth conversation.

Fear has so much power! When it is around, we usually get stuck. We become paralyzed and fail to act. We stop and hide. We run away from the issue as fast as we can. Fear debilitates us and moves us away from each other instead of toward each other.



Many times, what couples fear is that if they bring up the issue, it will hurt or ruin their marriage. A spouse is afraid that if she brings up her lack of sexual satisfaction, her spouse will call her names and think badly of her. Another spouse is afraid that if he brings up the issue of their finances, she will see him as incapable of providing for his family. Yet another spouse is afraid to say anything about how the other is parenting, because last time something was said, it ended in weeks of stonewalling and criticism.

We've shared this story about how lions hunt gazelles in over a hundred couples weekends; we hope you do not mind us sharing it here again.

We are told that gazelles are graceful and fast. As herd animals, they stay together in the herd and eat in open meadows where they can keep watch for any potential threats. Their speed and agility is admired and respected by their nemesis, the lions. Lions know that they are not as agile and fast as gazelles. As pack animals, they usually hunt in groups, with all the females of the pride taking part. The older female lions lie in tall grass near the herd of gazelles. The younger and faster female lions work their way around to the other side of the herd. When the signal is given, the younger lions charge toward the gazelle herd with the intention of separating out a few animals from the rest. As they get separated from the herd, this small number of gazelles is pushed by the younger lions toward the older females. As they enter the tall grass, the older female lions simultaneously let out their loudest roar. Fearing the sound of the old female lion's roars, the gazelles jump back away from the tall grass -- and into the waiting jaws of the younger female lions.

Unfortunately, people in most distressed marriages are like the gazelles. They do not have the hard conversations because the thing they fear the most, the destruction of the marriage, might happen. What they do not realize is that in not having the crucial conversation, the very thing that they fear is actually happening. Not having the crucial conversation begins to destroy the person holding back and gets in the way of moving toward each other.

False Evidence Appearing Real (F.E.A.R.)

Instead of letting fear win, we need to move forward with

courage to have the crucial conversation we most dread. We often ask couples, “Is your marriage worth having a crucial conversation?”

Crucial Conversation Rules

First: Pray

When we are about to do something of high importance in our lives, we usually take time to get in touch with the Creator and Source of all life. We pray for courage to have the conversation and for openness in receiving it. We pray for God’s guidance and wisdom in how to move forward, and for God’s healing hand on our hearts and our marriage. We are intentional about praying for God’s presence and purpose in our lives.

Know What You Want

We have had too many couples visit with us about their marriage problems and replay a horrible experience while trying to talk about what they have been afraid to discuss. Usually what they report is that each of them described (with great blame) what the other person had done wrong.

If your goal is to make sure your spouse knows what they did wrong, you are not going to have a successful crucial conversation. You are going to have a blame session instead.

If your goal is to make sure your spouse knows that you are right and they are wrong, you are not going to have a successful crucial conversation.

If your goal is to somehow make your spouse hurt at the same level that you have been hurt, you are not going to have a successful crucial conversation.

After you pray, but before you do anything else, make sure you know what you want out of the conversation. What is your goal for the conversation? How does that goal line up with your goal of Doing Life Together Forever? Know what you want to happen on the other side of the conversation, when you are finished and it is behind you.

Practice on Paper First

After you know what you want, you will do well to spend some time practicing the conversation on paper. Write out what you intend to say! When you write it out, you will be able to see what you are saying and think about how it will be heard. Writing it out will also allow you to rephrase things so that you can choose the best words to avoid accidentally triggering your spouse.

Writing out what you are thinking can help you take the emotion out of the conversation as well. If you write it, and cry while you read and write it, you will probably experience less emotion when you actually have the conversation. This will help you to be understood more clearly. Things do not always go as we plan them; but if you write out what you need to say, then you will be prepared to stay on track with the goals of your crucial conversation.

Consider Any Need for Support

We remember a Marriage Intensive with a soldier and his wife. We took them through a process where she was finally able to tell him how she felt that his mother tried to run her and the children's lives when he was deployed to Afghanistan. As he listened, it became apparent that he was totally unaware of the very thing that she had been most afraid to talk to him about. He promised to jointly set boundaries for his mom with her. As they were hugging

afterward, she said, “You know, I’ve tried to bring this up from time to time, but you always ran out of the room yelling at me. I’m so glad you stayed here and we actually got this solved.”

He was surprised to learn that she had ever brought it up before! As she began to tell him about one of the times she brought it up, it was apparent to all of us that she had begun with criticizing him, which led to his stonewalling and leaving.

We share this because it is so very important for you to consider getting some support for your crucial conversations. If you and your spouse have a history of getting loud or leaving before getting issues resolved, or if you think you or your spouse might not feel safe, it might be a good idea to invite someone else into your conversation.

If you choose to consider someone, let us encourage you to choose wisely. The truth is that most of the time, our friends and family members may be biased toward one of us, so involving someone close to us may not be that helpful.

We encourage couples to consider another couple, preferably a stable, veteran couple (someone who has been married longer than you have), or perhaps your Pastor or other clergy person. An elderly person in your lives, one whom you both respect, would be a good person to invite into the crucial conversation.

If neither of you has anyone like that in your lives, consider finding a Christian Counselor who will be willing to sit with you while you have the conversation.

The purpose of the support is not for them to offer advice or decide like a referee who is right and who is wrong. The purpose is to have someone else there who can keep both of

you having a respectful conversation together. You may want to print the Speaking and Hearing Truth rules and ask them to help both of you follow them.

If there is no individual in your lives that fits these criteria, and you do not have the money to pay for a counselor, consider having your meeting in a public space. Sitting in a restaurant full of other people, with light music playing, might be enough for each of you to continue to control your emotions and get through the crucial conversation together without a scene.

Schedule It

We are proponents of scheduling all crucial conversations. Think about how important this is. When you need to visit with a doctor, a lawyer, or even a plumber, you have to schedule it. How much more important it is for you to put this very important event in the life of your relationship into your schedule!

When you schedule your crucial conversation, it will give your spouse ample opportunity to know that the two of you are going to be talking earnestly about something important. That keeps the spouse from being “blindsided” by the issue, and it should also help to prevent having the initial moments of the conversation interrupted by a Time Out or a blowup.

Scheduling it also helps you work it around other important things going on in your life. It is hard to think about the relationship issue when your company’s downsizing meeting is in an hour! We are also so much brighter when we are operating with adequate nutrition and sleep. Scheduling allows us to not accidentally attempt such an important conversation when we are very tired or hungry.

A Safe Space With No Distractions

It is important that the two of you have your conversation in a space that feels comfortable for each of you. If you are in a room of the house where there is a long history of conflict and negativity, the crucial conversation may have trouble succeeding.

It is equally important that the crucial conversation happen where you will not be easily distracted or have a lot of interruptions. Crucial conversations are better had when the children are out of sight and possibly out of the house, with a baby sitter or at school. It is important that phones and electronic devices are turned off so both of you can focus on the matter at hand without interruption.

If you are meeting in a restaurant, it is better for the more easily distracted person not to sit with a view of the entire restaurant. For instance, Roy is more easily distracted than Devra; when they go out on a date, Roy always asks to sit in the chair facing the wall so that the only things in front of him are his wife and his food.

Use Your Speaking and Hearing Truth Skills

It is important for the person requesting the crucial conversation to be the first speaker. They are the one with the matter they want to bring up, so they should speak first. We encourage couples to print and bring with them the Speaking and Hearing Truth Rules in this book.

Be a Thermostat, Not a Thermometer

The reason you are having a crucial conversation is because there is a high probability of the conversation having emotional triggers. Remember, we cannot control what

triggers our spouse. In fact, we usually do not know we are doing something that will trigger them unless they tell us what it was that we did. We can only control the triggers we know about.

But we can control what we do with our own emotions. We cannot always control what triggers us, but we can control what we do with the anger, sadness, fear or negative emotion we have when we are triggered.

We have found that the analogy of the thermostat and thermometer is a helpful illustration of what we can choose to do with our emotions. Sometimes we act like a thermometer; a thermometer always matches the temperature of the room. For instance, when the room is 60 degrees, the thermometer will set itself on 60 degrees. If a fire breaks out in the room and the room temperature goes up to 200 degrees, the thermometer will also report 200 degrees.

A thermostat, on the other hand, does not match the temperature of the room. If the thermostat is placed on 72 degrees and the room is at 60 degrees, it will work to move the temperature of the room to 72 degrees. If the thermostat is placed on 72 degrees and the room is at 200 degrees, it will still work to move the temperature of the room to 72 degrees.

When we are faced with a spouse whose emotions move from 60 to 200 in just a minute or two, one of our options is to match them. As they become triggered and the energy builds into a higher volume of voice and more animated physical movements, we can choose to be like a thermometer and match their energy and do the same thing, or we can choose to be like the thermostat and remain calm and help soothe them. We can choose, instead of matching their energy, to be in charge of our own emotions and remain

calm. Our goal should be to help them take a break and regain control of their emotions. Sometimes that will include a Time Out.

Take a Time Out If Needed

If it is obvious that either you or your spouse is triggered and that the conversation is not going well, call a Time Out. Follow the Time Out rules and set up another time to continue the conversation. Consider having some support there for you during your next attempt.

Request What You Want

You have placed a great amount of time and energy into having this very important conversation. You know what you want, and have practiced having the conversation on paper as well as scheduling a time. You have even made arrangements for having your spouse's full attention and managed to avoid emotional triggers. Your Speaking Truth skills have stated clearly what the problem is. ***Do not leave the conversation without asking for what you want.***

We have seen too many couples blow their crucial conversation by not taking the step that clearly asks the spouse for what is wanted. We think the reason is that they either think the spouse is going to understand what to do just because they understand what the problem is, or they think that "anyone with common sense" would know what they need or want.

The heartbreak of going through all of that setup and then not getting resolution has to be as bad as or worse than never having the conversation to begin with! It is so important to

specifically ask for what you want. Chances are pretty good that if your spouse knew what you wanted they would already be doing it.

While working with marriages on the brink in Marriage Intensives, we have often heard, as we came to the end of the day, a request by too many spouses for things like, “love me better”, “be kinder to me”, “woo me”, or “act like you like me.” These are all great things to ask for, and we believe the need is high for such requests to be made. But what do they mean?

If we asked a hundred people to define what it means to “love me better”, we would get a hundred different answers. By asking your spouse to “love me better” you know exactly what you mean, but your spouse will be clueless. They may buy you more flowers, try to have sex more frequently, or spend more money on more vacations... all of which may not make you feel better loved, but may just add to your list of emotional triggers.

We encourage you to be very specific in listing what you want. If you were directing a play where you were instructing your spouse to “love you better” what would you tell him/her to do? How often? In what way? ***Be specific.*** Ask for what you want!

Be Open To “Yes”, “No” or a Counter Request

When putting your request together, be ready to accept “yes,” or “no.” There may be something in your request that they are able to agree to, and another part of the request that they are not able to agree to. Be willing to have your spouse request clarification about what you are asking, too.

Very often, the request is met affirmatively; but sometimes it is met with “yes, but...” which means there is a counter-request. For instance, one spouse might ask, “Will you be responsible for getting the kids up and fed before school?” and the other spouse might say, “Yes, but can we agree to heat up only microwave breakfasts for us on weekdays?”

We hope that you will be able to use the Crucial Conversation Rules effectively to help you move through fear and have the marriage-saving conversations your marriage deserves. Like the other skills in this book, you will find the skills of Crucial Conversations difficult the first two or three times you use them; but the more you use them, the more familiar they will become. The more Crucial Conversations you have, the less fear will stand in your way. By practicing these skills, you will deepen your connectedness to each other and strengthen your commitment to your relationship.

On the next page is a copy of the Crucial Conversation Rules for you to print and keep close to remind you of the principles of this chapter. May your marriage and relationship always be worth the hard conversations that will move you closer toward each other!

Crucial Conversations Rules:

Pray

Know What You Want

Practice on Paper First

Consider Any Need for Support

Schedule It

Safe Space with No Distractions

Use Your Speaking and Hearing Truth Skills

Be a Thermostat, Not a Thermometer

Take a Time Out if Needed (Use Time Out Rules)

Request What You Want(Specific, Measurable)

Be Open to “Yes”, “No”, or Counter Request

Chapter Six: Hope

Research results vary on the effect of books like this one on a marriage. Somewhere between 30 percent and 300 percent of couples who invest in their marriage with such activities have a better chance of staying married than those who do not! Every marriage needs regular maintenance and care. We invest in our relationship at least annually with a couples weekend or seminar, and sometimes we spend an intensive week growing our relationship together.

We hope, like you, that we will be together forever. We want a lifetime love! We want to grow old together, and watch our kids and grandkids grow up in healthy homes. We know that we have control of our part of our relationship; Roy cannot make Devra feel anything, do anything, or not do anything. Roy cannot determine what Devra does. Roy can influence, but he cannot control Devra. Likewise, Devra cannot make Roy feel anything, do anything, or not do anything. Devra cannot determine what Roy does. Devra can influence, but she cannot control Roy.

We believe that there is hope when either spouse does their part. Whether your spouse reads this book or not; how you speak your truth, how you listen to your spouse's truth, and how you manage your own emotions will influence how your spouse speaks and hears you and manages their emotions. One person in the marriage can be a marriage changer!

We wish you the best in your relationship. May you grow together toward a better future. If there is ever anything we can do to support you and your marriage, you can find us online at **LifeTogetherForever.com**.

Find Out More

Life Together Forever Weekends

Reconnect, Rekindle and Recommit; Biblical Truths that Transform Relationships with Roy & Devra Wooten

Want to...

... take your marriage to the next level?

... experience healing and restoration in your relationship?

... strengthen communication and intimacy?

Roy and Devra Wooten are veteran marriage champions, whose lives attest to the transforming power of Truth. Through their years of working with countless couples, they have molded their message into an engaging mixed format of teaching and experiential activities to quickly equip and empower couples toward greater spiritual and relational intimacy.

Learn, experience and practice the application of powerful Biblical Truths about relationships with other similarly motivated couples with the following sessions:

Doing Life Together Forever

Creating a Lifelong Marriage

Speaking and Hearing Truth

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Stress-Less Living

Healthy Expectations

Crucial Conversations

Sex Love and Romance

Relationships God's Way

To find out more about how Roy and Devra are working with couples to strengthen deep connection and do life together forever, please visit LifeTogetherForever.com. Learn about how to book the Wootens for upcoming events such as:

Relationship Seminars/Retreats

Marriage Intensive for Struggling Couples

Father/Daughter Seminars

Marriage Champion/Mentor/Minister Training

Small Group Facilitator Training

Family Engagement

Emotional Intelligence

How to Get Along With Almost Anyone

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