

**Contra Costa Men's Center**  
**Tips for Improving Your Intimate Relationships**  
**5 Winning and 5 Losing Strategies**

**The 5 Winning Strategies**

1. The Five Love Languages
2. Gottman's "Magic 5 Hours"
3. Building Positive Emotion
4. Clean Your Own House
5. Intimacy is Getting and Not Getting Needs Met

**Winning Strategy #1    The Five Love Languages**

According to Gary Chapman, author of *The Five Love Languages*, there is not one right way to show love; in fact, there are many different ways that we express and receive love. These include:

- Verbal appreciation
- Quality time together
- Receiving gifts (jewelry, cards, flowers)
- Doing things for your partner (chores, cooking meals, etc.)
- Physical Touch (holding hands, hugging, making love)

Knowing the primary languages of your partner and knowing your own provide the possibility of learning to speak each other's languages without one person's language being wrong (see separate handout).

**Winning Strategy #2****Gottman's "Magic 5 Hours"**

John Gottman, PhD, has found that couples whose relationships stay good over time devote an extra five hours per week to their relationship (see separate handout).

If you're in a current relationship, share this with your partner. Talk about what is already in place and what you need to add.

**Winning Strategy #3****Building Positive Emotion**

Building positive emotion can be more powerful than correcting flaws:

- a. Gottman found there is at least a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions in relationships that last. That includes appreciation, shared humor, gestures of affection and positive actions, small and large.
- b. More specifically, respond positively and with interest when your partner shares joy about an experience or an idea. Don't be a wet blanket! Research shows that an active positive response to a partner's joy can boost the goodwill in the relationship. Put the newspaper down! Make an affirming statement and ask 3 questions about it.
- c. Every day jot down and share with your partner 3 things you appreciate. (what has gone well that day; what your partner has done for you, etc.).
- d. Reminisce about positive moments in the past. At times like anniversaries and birthdays, savoring the past is a great opportunity to enrich the present.
- e. When your partner does nice things for you, including making changes that you request, let them know you see that and appreciate it (resist the pull to let them know the ways they fell short!)

**Winning Strategy #4****Clean Your Own House**

The more we have hurt, anger or disappointment from our past or from other parts of our lives, the more likely we are to take those feelings out on the people closest to us.

Taking care of that baggage can include:

- a. Not leading with anger. Understand the emotions underneath the anger - disappointment, rejection, sadness, fear - and express them.
- b. Finding satisfaction and balance in our lives. If we are unhappy in our jobs, or if we have no hobbies that provide us joy, or if we few no friends, we'll look to our partners to fill those needs. That's impossible for them to fulfill, or for them to expect us to fulfill.
- c. Be the first to make a repair attempt or be willing to receive one offered by your partner.

**Winning Strategy #5 Intimacy is Getting and Not Getting Needs Met**

Intimacy is about getting our needs met and accepting sometimes not getting what we want. The success of the relationship depends on how the two partners manage both aspects of love - the getting and the not getting.

One key piece of this is understanding the three modes of negotiation:

- a. Invitation: Would you like to go to the movies with me?
- b. Request: Would you be willing to pick up the kids at school today?
- c. Expressed Need: I need you to bathe the kids while I finish my report.

Be aware: Men often hear a, b and c as demands and feel controlled. Try instead to see this as teamwork and collaboration rather than as control.

## The 5 Losing Strategies

1. Life is about Winning and Losing
2. "Unbridled Self-Expression"
3. Attack/Blame or Withdrawal
4. Complaints/Retaliation
5. Controlling Your Partner

### **Losing Strategy #1**

### **Life is about Winning and Losing**

Men often learn as boys that life is just about winning. If we don't win, we feel we are a failure. Winning may make you a "success" in business and sports, but it's a recipe for failure in romantic relationships. If the only possible outcome is one person wins and the other loses, this makes partners into opponents and feeds a power struggle.

For many men, the prospect of going with a partner's wish if it doesn't agree with ours means we are being subservient and have lost. Losing may feel so shameful and unmanly, we'll do anything to control and be right even if it means never having a happy relationship.

### **Losing Strategy #2:**

### **"Unbridled Self-Expression"**

We hold out honesty as important in building trust. But when that honesty takes the form of uncensored criticism, that is what relationship expert Terry Real, calls "unbridled self-expression." Frequently reminding your partner all the ways they are not a perfect mate is a good example of this. Real says you can either vent negative feelings or you can find constructive ways to actually work through issues with a partner, but you can't do both.

### **Losing Strategy #3**

### **Attack/Blame or Withdrawal**

"Fight, flight or freeze" is our brain's most primitive response to perceived threats to our survival. When these same reactions show up in our everyday interactions as attacks, withdrawal and stonewalling, they create distance.

When we blame and attack our partners, we turn them into enemies; when we withdraw from them, we turn them into strangers. Neither strategy leads to closeness; instead, says Bay Area psychologist Dan Wile, we can connect

through what he calls “confiding” comments, which involve expressing feelings and needs while staying open to our partners.

“I know you didn’t intend this, but I felt kind of hurt when ....”

“I know you have a lot on your plate, but I really need you to do ....”

This approach allows us to voice our feelings but in a way that considers the other, and also assumes goodwill on both of your parts.

#### **Losing Strategy #4**

#### **Complaints/Retaliation**

Complaints and criticism create negative emotion for us all by calling attention to past failures. What’s the alternative? Focus on what you want from your partner now and in the future, rather than what you didn’t get in the past.

When you feel hurt, express that to your partner rather than hurting in return. Retaliation is giving the other person a dose of what you feel they have given you in the hopes they’ll feel the same hurt or anger you felt - either to punish them or to get them to feel remorseful. These are, as Terry Real says, twisted attempts at repair and they add hurt and distance rather than bringing us closer.

#### **Losing Strategy #5**

#### **Controlling Your Partner**

Trying to get our partners to do what we’d like them to do or be how we’d like them to be is controlling. Terry Real says it takes two forms:

1. Direct control: “You do it or I will punish you.”
2. Manipulation: “You do it or you will wish you had.”

Sometimes our attempts to control are ways to avoid the more painful and frightening feeling that you are truly helpless.

## Daily Living Rituals for Couples

John Gottman studied couples whose marriages stay good over time. He found that these couples consistently spend a few minutes with each other daily and two hours weekly. You may need to adjust these rituals to fit your own schedules.

### THE MAGIC 5 HOURS A WEEK

- **Partings:** Before these couples say good-bye every morning, they find out one thing that each is going to do that day, showing interest and support to the other. (2 min X 5 days/week = 10 min)
- **Reunions:** At the end of each workday these couples have a 20min. low-stress reunion conversation about the highs and lows of their day. They look forward to this time and don't allow other diversions to interfere with it. (20 min X 5 days/week = 1 hr 40 min)
- **Admiration** and appreciation: Every day genuine verbal appreciation given to each other at least once. (5 min X 7 days=35 min)
- **Affection:** A few moments of touching, holding, kissing, hugging or cuddling—all laced with tenderness, reconnection and, if needed, forgiveness. (5 min X 7 days = 35 min)
- **One Weekly Date:** In a relaxed atmosphere, these couples have a date, just the two of them, renewing their connection, good will and playfulness. A fun shared experience. . . a suspension in the daily grind to appreciate, laugh, play and explore new and old activities with each other. (2 hours once a week).  
note: This is not a time to discuss areas of conflict - that should be planned at another time during the week to problem-solve.

**This adds up to 5 hours a week.** These simple rituals can make a huge difference in the climate of your ongoing relationship by giving you daily positive connection that helps you better weather the stressful moments in life and recover more quickly following conflict.

*The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*  
Gottman and Silver, 1995

*Why Marriages Succeed or Fail . . . and How You Can Make Yours Last*  
John Gottman, 1994

~~~~~

### COUPLES COACHING FOR FULFILLING RELATIONSHIPS

Steven Freemire, MFT and Catherine Freemire, LCSW

stevenfreemire@jps.net • coachcat@jps.net

510.869.2505 • 925.939.4554