

Basic Principles and Practices

- all men and all women can learn improved means and methods of relating to each other;
- all men and all women can learn to manage inevitable differences much better and can accept and plan for the numerous annoyances and incompatibilities which are inevitable in all relationships;
- there is likely to be far more satisfaction from learning to play complementary roles well than from perpetually nursing the desire for a mate to be the ideally compatible individual;
- humorous responses (used gently and often) and the ability to select and develop light-hearted interpretations of life's inevitable awkwardnesses are of great value in aborting downward emotional spirals (interpretations where blaming the other person can cause great harm);
- great couples and failed (failing) couples have disagreements in identical areas and the ability to honor differences while never allowing them to rise to the level of conflict is the key behavioral difference, and this can be learned;
- more communication or communication, alone, is never the exclusive answer to a problem situation, but the respectful exchange of ideas while noting the preferences of the other (thus showing concern and respect for them including the validation of the other's value as a person) is an essential key. Building a connection is the goal--not necessarily increasing the word count;
- to personalize (blame the other) in your difficulties is almost always the wrong thing to do as very few "man mistakes" or "woman mistakes" are exclusive to your personal circumstances (dramatically high percentages of other couples have had your same, exact battles and the ones who accepted this fact graciously and worked to resolve them amicably remain together, in love);
- there is great value in accepting the influence of the other graciously--and in offering one's own influence gracefully and gently;
- keep the ratio of positive over negative comments overwhelming, in the nature of at least 10:1, while remembering that any negative response or outburst is likely to be remembered far longer;
- in tense moments, "soft starts" to any potentially conflicted conversational exchange is mandatory—and this concept must be repeatedly practiced and mastered;
- always seek healing tones and methods and never give resentment a foothold (allow for human foibles and errors when observing the “mistakes” of others and remember that you are daily and perpetually seeking to build a loving and caring home life);
- remember that experiencing some guilt may be useful in learning and re-directing ourselves, but that shaming another person, that is, finding fault in who they are, their intentions, and their very self, can be very destructive;
- it is essential to recognize difficulty as early as possible--and to tread lightly until the very best moment arrives to address a matter (note that far less than all items need to be addressed--time will allow most potential squabbles to disappear on their own--dying of unimportance in the larger context of the active cultivation of a longer term, enduring love);
- every couple can benefit from the active pursuit of fun and friendship (obviously, this takes special effort while caring for small children);
- recreational companionship should be cultivated and recreational compatibility should be pursued;
- nearly every woman will respond well to the direct promotion of her emotional safety and comfort;
- nearly every man will respond favorably to positive note or validation of his efforts or contributions;

- it is always valuable to choose warmth over grumpiness in responding to life's annoyances;
- the identification and the elimination of as many bad habits as possible can begin immediately;
- the identification of and the practice and repetition of as many good habits as possible can begin immediately;
- the near universal practice of assigning a mental illness diagnosis to persons experiencing relationship distress is quite likely to be iatrogenic. Boisvert, C., & Faust, D. (2002). Iatrogenic Symptoms in Psychotherapy: A theoretical exploration of the potential impact of labels, language, and belief systems. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 56, 244-259. ;
- there are many positive and romantic ideas and habits to cultivate--and to not seek them, to not learn them, and to not practice them is to risk missing some of life's greatest pleasures and enjoyments;
- there is great value in scripting, practicing, and faking improved expressions of new knowledge, methods and facts (this is the routine in all new learning—bicycling to bread-making, to being the best spouse that you can be);
- researching what others want, desire, appreciate and enjoy is essential. Know that what is of high importance to your spouse may be of lesser importance to you. Accommodate these preferences to the highest degree that you can—fully expecting that numerous day-to-day preferences and desires of men and women are likely to be different. Harley, Willard in *His Needs, Her Needs*;
- women may be more likely to reveal their annoyances regarding a variety of domestic concerns but they can learn that some of their standards may be well beyond a man's interests and women can learn to negotiate accordingly;
- men may not be fully sensitive to a woman's domestic standards but they can learn higher levels of respect and participation, thus displaying concern for fairness in the promotion and maintenance of complementary and loving home life;
- repair mechanisms must be prepared and used regularly, before significant deteriorations develop. All repairs involve softened tones and absolutely no harsh words or disrespectful responses. If you cannot stage an optimal recovery initially, arrange for a break (making a statement sharing care and concern while specifically planning to avoid deterioration) until you can review essential principles and return to attempt a loving recovery—a repair. Gottman, John in *The Marriage Clinic* p. 225;
- exposing children and youth to these basic principles is compatible with the majority of socialization fundamentals in numerous religions and societies.