

LASTING LOVE

*THE FIVE SECRETS OF GROWING A VITAL,
CONSCIOUS RELATIONSHIP*

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INTRODUCTION

Your New Path to Harmony and Vitality

What is the most important thing in your life?

You might say “food” if you haven’t eaten yet today. If you’ve had your breakfast, though, you’ll probably agree with us that the most important thing in life is the feeling of love inside you and around you. If you feel the flow of love in your life, you have a springboard to miracles under your feet with every step. If you don’t feel the flow of love, you can be a billionaire and feel like a pauper. Without love, you can be a movie star and not be able to look at your face in the mirror.

We know this at first hand, because several thousand couples have come through our office door over the past twenty years. All of them were seeking to restore the flow of love in their lives. A few of them were billionaires and movie stars you’d recognize, but all of them had problems you’d recognize. They are the same problems we’ve faced in our own marriage. They are exactly the same problems that you and everyone else will face in a committed relationship.

On the surface, the problems revolve around specific issues:

How can you end blame and criticism?

How can you stop arguing about money?

How can you keep passion and romance alive over time?

How can you agree on how to parent the kids?

Beneath those specific issues are big questions that everyone must answer:

How can you thrive in a long-term relationship as a creative individual and as an intimate partner?

How can you use the inevitable challenges of long-term relationship as

a springboard to greater closeness and creative vitality?

How can you ignite passion and vitality—and keep it glowing forever?

These were the questions we had to answer in our own marriage, and they were the questions that inspired much of our work in the decade after CONSCIOUS LOVING was published.

From 1990 until now, we have worked with many people in long-term relationships: Two thousand couples in private sessions, groups and seminars. These relationships ranged from 7-52 years in length, with an average length of 12 years. Most were heterosexual (85%); racial and ethnic minorities made up approximately 20% of the couples. We were interested in discovering what saps the vitality from long-term relationships and what can make the vitality surge again. We were especially interested in finding out what people could do to prevent vitality from decreasing in the first place.

Here is the essence of what we learned:

The Key Discovery:

In nine out of ten long-term relationships, vital energy slowly drains away because of problems in five specific areas. Even if the couple's surface conflict concerns sex or money, the real source of the problem is usually rooted in one of five issues:

- **Commitment**
- **Creative individuation**
- **Emotional transparency**
- **Sharing responsibility**
- **Appreciation**

If you address these problems with five simple techniques, you can generate passion and harmony, even if those qualities have been absent for years.

Here is a brief summary of the five foundation-insights of LASTING

LOVE.

The First Insight

In nearly every long-term relationship, one partner consistently puts more energy into the relationship than the other partner. Over time, this imbalance causes the initiator to feel tired and unappreciated. The solution is not to focus on getting the other partner to change, but for the initiator to make a commitment to his or her own creativity. In practical terms, the initiator must do something purely for self-expression (not for others) at least one hour per week. More is preferable, but major change starts to happen with at least one hour per week. This act of creative individuation often inspires change in the other partner.

Our research discovered that it only takes an hour a week of creative self-expression (journaling, learning an instrument, dance, nature-walks, meditation) to produce more vital energy in the individual and in the relationship. Surprisingly, the other partner begins to shift in positive directions as the initiator devotes more time and energy to individual creative expression.

The Second Insight

Relationships flourish in an atmosphere of emotional transparency, especially when both people speak clearly about the deeper emotions such as fear, sadness and longing.

In the LASTING LOVE program, partners learn how to speak difficult truths in friendly ways. For example, if you speak bluntly to your partner, such as “I’m gonna get you for flirting with Elmo at the party,” you will invariably experience conflict following this type of communication. However, if you use our friendly technique of microscopic truth—such as “When I saw you talking to Elmo I got scared”—you will get a much more friendly response. The first communication contains a threat, “I’m gonna

get you,” and an arguable perception, “flirting with Elmo.” Even if you could get everybody at the party to agree that your partner was flirting with Elmo, the statement would still trigger conflict.

The second communication contains a personal perception, “When I saw you...,” and an unarguable feeling-statement, “I got scared.” Reliably, this move stops conflict and opens a space for resolution. In fact, our research indicates that once either partner speaks a sentence like this, a resolution usually occurs within ten minutes.

A gender difference emerged from our research: Breakthroughs often occur when men speak plainly about fear, sadness and longing, and when women speak plainly about anger. We tailored different strategies to the differing styles of men and women, and these strategies will be described in detail later in the book.

The Third Insight

Relationships thrive only when partners share responsibility for issues and duties. On a daily basis, vitality grows when each person takes full responsibility for any issue that arises. Vitality surges when both partners stop blaming and start claiming ownership of problems.

By contrast, most people try to apportion responsibility by asking the wrong question—Whose problem is it? This question always leads to blame, conflict and power struggles. For example, a conflict about money may recycle for years, but it will only get resolved when each person claims full responsibility. Initiators habitually take more than 100% responsibility for issues that arise. This allows the other partner to get away with taking less than 100% responsibility. It is essential that initiators let go of the burden of extra responsibility, so that a balance can be attained in the relationship.

People squander massive amounts of creative energy in relationships when partners point the finger of blame at each other. With the

Responsibility Principle, partners meet on the equal ground of full ownership, thus eliminating the wasted energy of blame and power struggles.

The Fourth Insight:

Every relationship conflict is rooted in a hidden commitment problem, even if the partners have been nominally committed for decades. If this commitment issue is addressed correctly, it becomes a springboard to a profound breakthrough in harmony and creative energy.

Although most of the research on this principle was carried out in marital relationships, we also confirmed it in the business world through our consulting work in approximately eighty companies. As we convey in lectures, the principle applies in the boardroom as well as the bedroom. By analyzing hundreds of conflicts, we discovered that the problem often began with a commitment that didn't get made. In other words, someone (or sometimes all parties) did not fully commit to a significant activity in the partnership. We worked out a simple way to find where the commitment problem was located and a technique for moving through the impasse rapidly.

The Fifth Insight

Relationship vitality starts to wane in an "appreciation gap," and vitality continues to drain away as this gap widens. A specific place and time can be pinpointed where the break first occurred in the ongoing flow of appreciation. Specific techniques can restore the flow of appreciation, and this flow liberates creative energy in the partnership.

In the early stages of a relationship, partners speak appreciations to each other frequently. As time passes, they speak fewer appreciations, instead devoting more and more time to solving problems. Problem-solving is often directed outwardly toward children, maintenance of house and

property, and other items that need constant attention. Usually, partners direct problem-solving toward themselves only when conflict occurs.

One of our clients said, "I knew my marriage was over the day I got off an airplane, expecting a welcoming hug and kiss, and instead was greeted with 'The upstairs toilet broke again.'" Fortunately, they were able to become LASTING LOVE again, through balancing their problem-solving with more spoken appreciations.

The Benefits

If the partners are willing to practice the simple techniques of the program, they get an immediate pay-off in the form of a quantum shift in the level of harmony and creative energy. The heart and soul of the new paradigm is *the celebration of essence*. Essence is the word we use for the unconditioned, authentic self, the person we truly are beneath all the learned survival-responses of early life. The higher purpose of love-relationships is to bring essence to light, revealing the essential creative self beneath all the personas everyone uses to survive and get recognition. In order for relationships to flourish, the essence of each person must be recognized and brought forth. If we are not willing to reveal who we truly are—or if we are not willing for the other person to reveal his or her true self—conflicts will always follow in the aftermath of the decision to *stonewall essence*.

The new paradigm comes with a comprehensive new set of communication tools. LASTING LOVE is a program anyone can use to transform relationships at home and at work. Useful both with adults and children, these new activities produce magical results in relationships, even if only one person employs them. However, when both people understand the principles and practice the activities, they achieve a quantum enhancement of closeness and creative energy.

In Summary

A crew from CBS came to do a feature on our work a while back. They followed us around for three days as we worked with couples, talked to each other over dinner and so forth. The reporter (his face would be familiar, but we will preserve his anonymity for reasons that will be clear shortly) did a great job with the interviews and on the ultimate televised feature as well. After the cameras were turned off, he let down his guard and got personal: “You two are so upbeat and make it sound so do-able, but is it really?” He said he’d seen plenty of *comfortable* couples, but he’d seldom met any who got closer and more creative as the years went by. He and his wife had struck a bargain—he would be the “star” and she would be the support person. Yet, the deal was already proving costly—she was depressed and he was restless. We could feel the despair he was carrying. Here he was—handsome, talented, young, articulate—and yet he had already given up and settled for less than what he envisioned his marriage could be.

We believe he speaks for millions of people. The evidence is dismal, both from personal observation and from the scientific research. If you look around your family, friendship network and community, you probably cannot find very many people in long-term relationships who are thriving as creative individuals and growing closer as lovers at the same time. The norm in stable long-term relationships tends to be more in the direction of comfort, compromise and, sometimes, truce.

Although we were growing up on opposite edges of the country, in Florida and California, we both remember having a similar moment of insight when we were in junior high. For Kathlyn, the awareness came while watching her parents and their friends play a party game in a high state of alcohol-inspired merriment. She saw her parents laughing and talking animatedly, two things she never saw them do in normal life. She thought, “If this is as good as it gets for adults, I don’t want anything to do with it.” For Gay it came when he was asked to write an essay on something he

believed in strongly. He chose the subject, "Why I will never get married." He said that he'd never seen a person who was both married and lively. The married couples he saw in his family and town all looked bored, pained and tranced-out, as if they were sleep-walking on a rocky road.

Through destiny or happy chance, we ended up turning these insights into productive careers rather than cynical bitterness. By holding out for what we really wanted, we also managed to get through the maze of fate to find each other. Ultimately, the guy who vowed never to get married found (and married!) the girl who decided never to grow up. We channeled our energies into discovering ways to get closer and more fully ourselves in the course of a long-term relationship. Now, after twenty-some years and several thousand couples-sessions, we've finally put all the pieces of the program in place.

First and foremost, we are our own best customers, as any therapist or relationship expert must be. We did a great deal of research in the laboratory of our own hearts and minds, in order to find out how to keep our own relationship growing bountifully. Even if we had never shared the LASTING LOVE program with other couples, we would know in our hearts that it works.

LASTING LOVE is our most comprehensive work, and at the same time our simplest. The program rests on the foundation of five solid principles, and is brought to life with five radically simple techniques. We call them "radically" simple in the spirit of the original Latin word, *radix*, which means "root" or "core." Although simple, each of the central techniques changes the core dynamics of the relationship whenever they are applied.

We want to live in a world where all of us can feel the warm embrace of genuine intimacy instead of settling for the numbing couch-comforts of compromise. We want to live in a world where each of us also gets the chance to contact and express our full creative potential.

We bet you want to live in that kind of world, too.

From working on ourselves and with our clients, we know that this new world is possible. We also know that it is earned, not inherited or given. It is created by ordinary people with the will and courage to make extraordinary commitments. It is done one step at a time, with persistence and a good map.

LASTING LOVE is a map that was created “the hard way,” by many trials and many errors. We tell our students: If we know anything at all about relationships, it’s because we’ve made every mistake ourselves at least once, and worked with it in others at least a dozen times. For us, the road was not always easy, but the rewards are beyond anything we ever imagined. If our map can save people from taking unnecessary detours and hitting speed-bumps at a jarring pace, we will feel doubly rewarded.

If it assists you in feeling the incredible vitality we’ve revealed in over the past two-plus decades, we will feel that our life purpose has been fulfilled.

CHAPTER ONE

FIVE SECRETS OF LASTING LOVE

Here's the bottom-line truth we discovered from our decade of work with couples in long-term relationships: People can endure long-term relationships in many ways, but they will only thrive if they do five things. In other words, you can grow older with your partner in many ways, but you will only grow closer and more creative through the steady practice of five actions.

We believe these five actions should be taught in every classroom in every school, every day. They most definitely should not be secrets we have to seek after or stumble into by trial and error. Yet they are. Almost none of us begin our love-relationships knowing how to do these simple things, and our relationships are disastrous as a consequence.

Let's permanently remove the veil of secrecy that has covered these skills, and begin a new era of intimacy in close relationships.

The First Secret

If you want a close, vibrant love-relationship, you need to become a master of commitment. So...

We teach couples how to make real commitments to each other. There is an art to commitment, and almost nobody knows how to practice it. The first art of commitment is to spot and acknowledge the unconscious commitments that drive our misery-making machinery. Imagine the power of Bill Clinton saying, "From the evidence, I'm slowly beginning to realize that I'm committed to philandering, sexual betrayal and lying. I also appear to be committed to getting caught. I'm committed to finding out if people will still like me after they find out I'm a bad boy." In practical reality, the act of claiming ownership of an unconscious commitment changes a troublesome dynamic in a relationship faster than anything else.

The second art of commitment is to make commitments you can stand by. Real commitments can only be made about things you have control over. Real commitments are verifiable. If you make a phony commitment, such as "I promise to love you forever," you set up an impossible situation by promising an illusion. Nobody can commit to loving someone forever, because some days you won't even wake up feeling loving toward yourself. Love is a mystery—part feeling, part spirit, part mind—and mysteries by their very nature are outside our control. A real commitment would be to commit to telling your partner the truth about when you're feeling loving and when you're not. This type of commitment saves relationships while turning on the flow of intimacy and creativity.

The LASTING LOVE program offers a specific set of commitments we've researched with several thousand couples. When couples make these commitments, their relationships thrive.

The Second Secret

If you want a long-term relationship that's both close and creatively

vital, you've got to become emotionally transparent. To go all the way to ultimate closeness and full creative expression, you must eliminate all barriers to speaking and hearing the truth about everything. So...

We teach couples how to listen to the truth about everything from their partners. We teach them how to speak the truth about everything to their partners. Everything means everything: Feelings, deeds, hopes, dreams. We ask them to consider any hesitation about telling or hearing the unvarnished truth to be a symptom of resistance to greater love and creativity.

We know this move is radical because it produces huge bursts of creative energy in everyone who tries it. As a practice, it has awesome power. As a concept, it polarizes people quickly—we've seen talk-show audiences erupt in cheers and boos when we've said couples need to tell the truth to each other about everything. After twenty-plus years, though, we've still found no exceptions to the truth-rule.

The Third Secret

If you want a long-term relationship that's both close and creatively vital, you must break the cycle of blame and criticism—it's an addiction that saps creative energy as surely as drugs or drink. So...

We invite couples to turn their relationship into a blame-free zone. We teach each partner to take full responsibility for everything that occurs in the relationship, especially if it looks like it's the other person's fault. Radical responsibility—and the powerful creative energy it unleashes—comes from catching yourself in the midst of saying "Why did you do that to me again?" and shifting to "What am I doing that keeps inviting that behavior?"

We ask couples to go a strict no-blame diet and stick to it. As a practice, this move liberates awesome energy. In fact, we've seen life-altering breakthroughs come about when couples simply went one full day without criticizing or blaming each other. As a concept, the idea of giving up

blame and criticism is often greeted with derision. “Impossible,” some say; “How boring,” say others. We have found that it’s actually possible, and anything but boring. The couple who is deeply addicted to blame and criticism has usually come to mistake the adrenalized-drama of conflict for the flow of connection. The idea of life without the adrenalin may seem dull and empty at first, much like a lifelong flagellant must feel that first day without the self-administered whip.

The Fourth Secret

If you want a vibrant long-term relationship—one in which you feel close as a couple and creative as individuals—you’ve got to do one big thing first. You’ve got to take your attention away from fixing the other person and put it on expressing your own creativity. Even an hour a week of focusing on your own creativity will produce results. More will often produce miracles.

Nothing will sap your vital energy faster than squelching your creativity. Often, couples stifle their individual creativity in order to focus on fixing and changing the other person. Since this seldom produces tangible results quickly, they devote more energy to the other person as a fixer-upper and less to individual creativity. When results are not forthcoming, they complain about the other person to third parties. They enter a dangerous cycle of complaint that has addictive properties—the more you do it the more things there are to complain about. Ultimately this leads to dissipation of creative energy and inner despair.

By contrast, fully creative people don’t have time for complaint. Even if you’re not fully engaged in creativity (even, as our research indicates, if you’re only doing an hour a week of creative expression) you will see quantum enhancement of vitality with every increase in creative self-expression.

The Fifth Secret

If you want to create vital, long-lasting love, you must become a master of verbal and non-verbal appreciation. So...

We teach couples how to appreciate each other spontaneously and frequently. Although this may sound like a simple thing, it most definitely is not. In fact, it's the last thing we teach in the program because it's the hardest to learn. To utter a clear, heart-felt appreciation to another person is radical partly because it's so rare. To receive such an appreciation from another person is equally challenging. Most of us have never seen or heard a rich flow of spoken appreciations in relationships. In fact, many people cannot recall a single instance of clear appreciation in their families of origin.

The simple solution is to speak a heartfelt ten-second appreciation to the other person, for no reasons other than to signify a commitment to appreciation and to open the flow of appreciation. In other words, the spoken appreciation is not to get a particular result from the other person. In reality, it produces powerful results very quickly, but it is important that the appreciation not be spoken as a manipulation or in expectation of a reward.

We teach couples how to say simple and complex appreciations, ranging from "I like the way you did your hair today," to "Throughout our lives together, I have been repeatedly amazed by how generous you are." Although most couples can learn the art in an hour, they tell us that it takes the better part of a year's daily practice to savor its full value.

These five actions produce a heartfelt revolution in any relationships in which they're practiced. The five actions move people quickly through the stuck places so that they can enjoy the profound beauty of genuine love. We will have a great deal more to show you about these five actions when we explore them in the chapter to come. First, though, let's go a little deeper into what we mean by *genuine love*.

How Genuine Love Differs From Learning-Love and Toxic-

Attraction

First, make a distinction between toxic-attraction and any kind of love. In toxic-attraction, people who fundamentally don't like or respect themselves invite others like them into their lives. They form entanglements in order to have company in their misery. They want fellow-victims to complain to and to complain about. They want others to join them in their path of self-destruction. Based on thirty years of relationship counseling, we've seen that toxic-attraction is the foundation of about 5% of relationships. Fortunately that's only about one out of twenty relationships, but the statistics mean nothing if you are one of those twenty.

Make a further distinction between two stages of love. In most long-term relationships, love grows through two stages: Learning-love and genuine love. Most of us proceed slowly through a period of learning-love before we reap the harvest of genuine love. Learning-love is about learning those things you need to learn in order to feel genuine love. Learning-love is about repeating lessons until you get them. In learning-love, you pull certain people into your life to learn something only they can teach you. Once you learn that lesson, you enter a deeper relationship with that person or move on to another. The quest is for genuine love, and learning-love is a step along the way.

In learning-love, you are trying to get something: Getting the love you think you need, getting approval, getting repeated reminders to be in touch with your feelings, getting reminders to stand up for yourself. Genuine love is not about *getting* anything. It's about living in a flow of giving and receiving. In learning-love, you struggle over control of space and time: You crave more space or more closeness, you think the other person is too slow or too fast, too full of feelings or too shut off from them. There is either too much or not enough of sex, of money, of intimacy.

Genuine love is not about completing yourself. Genuine love is

between two equals who know they are complete in themselves. Learning-love is between two people who do not feel whole; each person feels lacking in something. They throw themselves into love in order to learn, and when they have learned to feel whole--when they have discovered that there is no lack that can be filled from outside them--then they may embark upon the journey of genuine love.

We know all this at first hand, because we've been there and back. Both of us have had many lessons in the painful school of learning-love. We've signed up for courses with names you'll probably recognize:

"Trying to save another person from his/her self-destructive tendencies,"

"Trying to critique and improve the other person while overlooking major flaws of our own."

"Trying to get love and approval from someone who was stingy with both."

Genuine love is a new paradigm--not about survival, not about getting. It's based on a commitment to celebration and to making a space in which others can celebrate.

The lesson of learning-love is simple but maddeningly hard to master. It is this: You are the creator of your life. If you desire more intimacy than the tiny amount you're getting, it's because you--for some conscious or unconscious reason--have made up the rule that you can only have a tiny amount of intimacy. If you don't feel you have the space you need to grow, it's because you--for some conscious or unconscious reason--have made up the rule that you can't have space to grow.

It takes most of us many years to master the lesson of learning-love. In fact, we've seen many intelligent people go to their graves without seeming to experience any genuine love. If it doesn't take you that long, lucky you! It took us many years of work on ourselves before we went to

bed and woke up every day feeling fully for our lives. It's an idea with so much power that it scares a lot of people away. The couch-comforts of victimhood offer a much safer place from which to watch life. Of course, the problem with that kind of safety is that you don't get to participate fully in life and love. You miss out on the exhilarating satisfactions of accessing your deep potential and contributing to others.

Needless to say, we're big advocates for going all the way to realizing your full potential. We don't encourage anyone to settle for "okay" when magnificence is freely available.

Focus on Committing, Creating and Appreciating

In order for an intimate relationship to survive past the first few years, couples often get some trial-and-error skill in speaking the truth and taking responsibility. If they don't, the relationship usually falls apart around those two issues. The average length of a romantic relationship has decreased over the years, and at present seems to be in the range of four to four-and-a-half years. We find that when couples in long-term relationships come to us, they have stumbled their way to some understanding of the importance of truth and responsibility in their relationship. However, commitment, creativity and appreciation are a different matter. Oddly enough, almost no one we work with has a conceptual grasp or a practical fluency with these arts.

There's no reason any of us should be good at them at all. After all, most of us receive no training, formal or informal, in how to make genuine commitments, how to access lifelong creativity, or how to deliver meaningful appreciations. As therapists and seminar leaders for thirty years, we have witnessed hundreds of occasions when a single act of appreciation--expressed simply and from the heart--brought people closer together in a heartbeat's time. We have also witnessed the near-miraculous power of a shift in commitment in opening the gateway to intimacy. We have seen

people change (and sometimes save) their lives by expressing their creativity.

Discovering the secrets to creativity, commitment and appreciation has been the most exciting professional and personal journey of our lives thus far. We are tremendously enthusiastic about sharing the secrets of the arts. The set of skills will equip anyone with a powerful and reliable method for enhancing the flow of connection in any relationship. Although we will focus mainly on love-relationships, the skills also apply to business, friendship, parenting and other areas where the flow of connection is paramount.

Active Skills

Many people wrongly think that creativity, commitment and appreciation are passive states of being. They incorrectly assume that you're either committed or you're not, you're appreciative or you're not, you're creative or you're not. The good news is quite the opposite: These are active arts—skills you can practice from moment to moment.

Committing, Creating and Appreciating in Action

Here is a brief story of the power of the new paradigm:

We're sitting with a man and a woman in our office, trying to help them out of a marital jam so long in the making and so long overlooked that it feels like death hovers in the room with us. They've been together fourteen years, and it's essentially been fourteen years of struggle. After hearing their story, we ask them to do something radical: We ask them to declare this marriage dead. "If you will declare this marriage dead, we will ask you a question that will bring a new one to life or help you walk away from the death of this one with fewer wounds."

They're puzzled, but they go along with us and declare it dead.

We pause for a full minute of silence to honor the death of a noble effort that turned awful. When our minute is up, all of us open our eyes. We ask them:

"What did you learn from this marriage that you could not have learned any other way?"

The question catches them by surprise, and they answer it candidly. In the years since we first asked that question, we've heard people speak their reply in hundreds of different ways. No matter how they word it, people often come down to saying the same two things:

- 1. "I found out the hard way that I'm more committed to my old patterns than I am to loving and being loved."*

In other words, they gradually put a commitment to an old pattern (criticizing, over-drinking, controlling) ahead of the commitment to the relationship. They didn't know how to make a conscious commitment to the relationship that was bigger than their unconscious commitment to their respective destructive patterns.

- 2. "I discovered too late that I didn't get or give enough appreciation, and I waited until too late to do anything about it."*

In other words, they were unskilled and stingy in the area of appreciation.

Next, we ask them another question.

"Given the demise of this marriage, and given what you've learned from it, are you willing to make a commitment to a new marriage? Are you willing to create a marriage in which you both feel fully appreciated and you make the relationship more important than your old patterns?"

We ask them to consider the question carefully, in the quiet of their own minds and hearts, then give me a clear "yes" or "no."

After thirty seconds or so of silence, they spontaneously open their eyes at the same time. They both nod and say "Yes."

The air clears...the energy in the room lightens up as their faces relax. We all sit back in our chairs, knowing there's work to be done but also knowing there's a new possibility that had not existed before.

Next, we ask: Would each of you be willing to devote the same amount of energy to expressing your creativity that you've been using to fuel your conflict?

Again, they're caught by surprise. It hasn't occurred to them that the exact same energy that's required to drive conflict can be used to inspire and express creativity.

Eventually they agree to turn their conflict-energy into creativity energy, but they're quick to tell us they don't know how.

"Nobody does," we say, "but once you make the commitment, the exact path always reveals itself."

The miracle unfolded over the next two months, and continues to blossom now. They made good on their initial "Yes," using the new technology of commitment and appreciation we describe later in the book. Within two months they had created something brand-new, and at a four-year follow-up they said it was unimaginably better than their "first" marriage. In fact, they said that because they didn't understand commitment and appreciation, the first marriage had been doomed from the beginning. Even though their first marriage had lasted fourteen years and this new one only four years so far, it felt as if the first one had not ever existed.

That's the power of commitment, the first principle of the new paradigm. Now, take a closer look at the appreciation and creativity.

Human beings alternate between two ongoing cycles: A cycle of complaint or a cycle of appreciation. The ratio between the two—the amount of time we spend in each—determines how happy we are and how much happiness we inspire around us. It also affects how much creativity we express and inspire in others.

The cycle of complaint goes as follows:

We want or need something from our partner, such as more communication, more understanding, more touch. However, for some reason, often lost in the mists of childhood, we're unconsciously committed to not getting those things.

So, of course, we don't get what we want...

We complain about it and criticize...

The situation usually doesn't improve (or if it does, it improves only temporarily before returning to baseline or worse.)

We complain and criticize more, which leads to greater awareness of our partner's insufficiencies. Armed with more detailed evidence, we escalate our barrage of criticism and complaint.

We've worked with couples who had been recycling the same complaint for decades. Our conclusion—which at first dawned on us with surprise—is that nobody ever gets better by being criticized. Almost everybody who does it, though, is convinced that if they keep it up long enough it will have the proper motivational effect on the other person.

The cycle of appreciation goes as follows:

We look for things to appreciate about our partners.

We discover new ones or notice old ones anew...

We speak our appreciations clearly...

We see more things to appreciate, which leads to greater awareness of our partner's value.

Living in a cycle of complaint consumes the very energy needed for creative expression. Living in a cycle of appreciation frees up energy that each person can use for individual and mutual creativity.

The Learning-Edge

What most of us need to know is this: We have a choice about which cycle to live in. What most of us *really* need to know is this: How to shift quickly out of the cycle of complaint into the cycle of appreciation.

We've been running a large-scale research survey, via our website, on the subject of appreciation. One of our research associates sent us a note a while back in which she articulates her own reaction to something that happened at a dinner with us.

"Speaking of appreciation, I remember the first time I ever saw a clear example of it. The three of us were in a restaurant together when we first met. At one point in the conversation Kathlyn said something funny. I vividly remember your turning to her and saying, out loud, casually, as if it was the most natural thing in the world: 'One of the things I really love and appreciate about you is your fantastic sense of humor. You make my life so much richer because of how you look at the world. I was just feeling grateful for that and wanted you to know it.' Kathlyn smiled warmly and thanked you, then you both went back to talking about whatever we'd been talking about. I sat there perplexed for a moment. Although I'd seen strong, stable marriages before, I'd never seen this kind of communication. It's not the way most people talk, nor is it really the way most people think, either. Later, I realized that I was waiting for the punchline. I expected you to follow your appreciation with something teasing or funny or even insulting, and when it didn't come, I didn't know quite what to think. My mind was thinking: 'wait a minute...so you're just going to appreciate her? Out of the blue? For no reason? Without wanting anything in return?' I think I learned something brand-new about relationships that day."

Embedded in her observation are important insights into a new paradigm of relationship. For example, it surprised her to see one of us appreciate the other "out of the blue" and "for no reason." In other words, she witnessed appreciation for its own sake, with no other agenda running as a sub-text of the communication. In addition, the appreciation was spoken "without wanting anything in return." In other words, it was not designed to produce an outcome or result. This latter observation

distinguishes the art of appreciating from the related art of praising. There is no question that praise is a useful and important skill--many books are available on how to do it effectively. For example, in the classic book, *The One-Minute Manager*, authors Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson show how to use praise to reward good performance and shape employees' behavior in a positive direction. In Thomas Gordon's books on parent-effectiveness and teacher-effectiveness, he presents a methodology for influencing children's behavior by the power of praise.

That's not what we're talking about.

The art of appreciating operates in a different paradigm, which may be why there aren't many books about how to do it. As we will show later, the paradigm in which appreciation occurs is not linear nor is it intended to produce a specific result. It does not fit within a reward-and-punishment schema. You shift into the new paradigm by making a conscious decision, a commitment to base your relationships on an ongoing flow of positive energy. You choose to focus on appreciation "for its own sake," not to influence the behavior of the other person. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, the skills of *Active-Appreciating* and *Conscious-Committing* actually have a profoundly positive effect on other people's behavior. Things change for the better the moment either of these skills enters a relationship.

Here is an example of appreciation for its own sake, drawn from our own relationship:

"One morning I (GH) awoke early to do some writing. After an hour or so I took a break to meditate, and during meditation an idea popped into my mind. I wrote 'THANK YOU!' about a dozen times with different-colored ink, then cut the paper into strips with a pair of scissors. Each strip had a "Thank you!" on it. I put a "Thank you!" on each step of the stairs Kathlyn would take after she woke up. I was upstairs when I heard her sleepy footsteps approach the stairs. Suddenly I heard a giggle, then another and

another as she came up the stairs and encountered each of my different Thank You's. When she came into the kitchen she was absolutely aglow."

Can you think of a better way to start the day? (If so, please let us know so we can try it.)

A New Paradigm of Relationship

We believe that concepts such as *Conscious-Committing* and *Active-Appreciating* constitute a shift in context that fundamentally alters the way in which people regard intimate relationships. This new paradigm is what caught Laura's attention that night.

Prior Contexts

Up until very recently, the context of intimate relationships was clouded by survival fears. Although this is still true for many people, there are millions of people for whom survival is not the main priority when they wake up each day. Fears about hunger, deprivation and other survival issues shape the nature of relationship. For example, survival-fears make it important to do one's duty by steadfastly inhabiting the roles prescribed by the social and religious authority structure of the time. In times past, less attention was paid to psychological or spiritual fulfillment. Techniques for problem-solving were essentially non-existent. Gay tells an illustrative story: "When I was in graduate school, I mentioned to my grandfather that I was in therapy to 'handle some issues about my self-esteem.' He asked me what therapy was, and chuckled as I explained it to him. I asked him how they handled such issues when he was a young man. 'Issues, hell,' he said, 'We were too busy handling plows.'" He had run away from home at sixteen to avoid getting trapped in the role of a farmer. As long as he didn't have to handle a plow, he figured he'd handled the biggest issue he'd ever have to face. He and my grandmother had carved a homestead out of the Florida swamps, where they contended with snakes, alligators and malaria on a regular basis.

Things changed as the twentieth century gained momentum. From our parents' time up until the present, the context of relationship shifted toward "luxury-items" such as the fulfillment of potential. Movies, literature and other arts began to celebrate the transcendent possibilities of relationship--symbolized by the graceful dance of Fred and Ginger. The Freudian revolution promised to offer tools for handling problems when missteps caused us to tread on each other painfully.

The New Context

It's a big shift from survival ("handling plows") to fulfillment ("handling issues.") In the survival-context, life is lived in waves of things like fear and hunger, with periods of relief from those things. In the fulfillment-context, life is lived in waves of fulfillment and the hunger for more. We believe, however, that the context is about to make an even larger shift, opening access to a new force-field. This new force is electric with previously-hidden potential. We believe that relationships in the new millennium will shift toward a focus on appreciation and celebration. The focus will be on the flow of connection.

The couples who come to us now want more than traditional problem-solving skills. As people become more sensitive to the flow of energy inside themselves and in their relationships, they are looking beyond traditional therapeutic techniques. They want life-skills they can use by-the-moment to awaken and enhance the flow of connection. The arts of committing and appreciating are the best ways we've found to deepen the flow of connection. A single act of skillful committing or appreciating instantly shifts the relationship into a greater felt-sense of flow.

To imagine the kind of context-shift we're talking about, think of a magician's tablecloth trick. Picture two fabulous place-settings: Baccarat crystal glasses, Limoges china and your favorite silver. Imagine you and your beloved sitting down to dine amidst the beauty of the table-setting,

when suddenly you realize the table cloth is made of...wax paper.

Quickly, though, you make a decision to enhance the quality of your life rather than despairing over it. You snap your fingers and a magician appears. With a wink and a smooth flourish, the magician whips the wax paper out from under the place settings without disturbing them. With another magical move, he slides a crisp linen tablecloth under the place-settings, without so much as rattling a teacup. Suddenly the essential beauty of what was there before is enhanced. Only one thing has changed, but everything has changed.

That's not only a context-shift, it's a conscious marriage of the power of your intention with your ability to create real magic.

That's the domain of the new paradigm.

Practically Speaking

It only takes a split-second to make a commitment to enhancing your relationships. The moment changes everything, though, because you shift out of earlier contexts such as survival and the search for fulfillment. You enter a new zone, full of new possibilities and based on entirely new questions.

In the survival context, relationships exist inside the question, "What must we do to survive?" Considerable time is spent shoring up defenses against hostile forces and carrying out chores in the rut of routine. There is little time or energy to search for fulfillment. You are watching and listening for threats to your survival.

In the fulfillment context, we live inside different questions, such as "What must we do to fulfill our potential?" and "How can we solve the problems which are the barriers to expressing that potential?" Considerable attention is paid to the past, where the barriers were presumed to have been originally erected. Considerable energy is consumed in power struggles about which partner bears responsibility for the barrier. You are

watching and listening for how to meet the needs of others and whether your own needs are being met.

In the new paradigm we offer in this book, the questions are profoundly different than survival or fulfillment. Your relationships live within questions such as,

“What commitments do I need to embrace which will allow the relationship to flourish?”

“What do I really admire and love about my partner?”

“How can I best appreciate those qualities and actions?”

“What can I do to make myself more available for appreciation?”

Although you have good problem-solving techniques at your disposal, you do not focus as much on problems. Instead, you look for what’s right in the other person and in the relationship. You embark on a shared quest to find each other’s essential qualities so that they may be skillfully appreciated.

You initiate your entry into the new paradigm with a conscious choice. Imagine life as a waiter or waitress, offering you a menu with three choices on it:

- Living your life in waves of fear.
- Living your life in waves of fulfillment.
- Living your life in waves of celebration.

If you were going to pick one, what would your choice be?

In our relationship seminars, 99% of the participants choose celebration. There seems to be one or two people in every group who cannot imagine life without fear or the quest for fulfillment. Almost everyone else, though, sees that the conscious choice to organize your life around a context of appreciation opens up the greatest number of possibilities. If your life is about appreciation, you can celebrate even the days when your body is occupied by fear or your mind is pre-occupied with a

potential you haven't fulfilled.

Contrasting the Old Paradigms with the New

At lunch that day, our young colleague witnessed a communication which was not colored by survival or fulfillment. It came from the new paradigm, one in which there are no expectations embedded in the communications between partners. If you listen closely to the communications of most couples, you will see that some of their utterances may be colored by survival concerns, but a majority of them are surrounded by an aura of fulfillment and the lack thereof. Specifically, communications come with expectations embedded within them--or disappointment and anger that those expectations have not been fulfilled. Nowadays, when one partner says to another, "You forgot to get the potatoes at the store," he or she is not likely to be talking about a survival issue. The sub-text of the communication might be "How could you have forgotten to do something so simple?" or "If you loved me, you would have remembered the potatoes." S/he may be saying, "I don't feel loved and appreciated, and here's further evidence of why I have every right to feel that way."

These patterns have a way of hardening into place with time, so that within a few years most couples have developed rigid, predictable styles of communicating. One of our poet-friends came by to visit us after being at a party with many long-married couples. She lamented that most of the couples looked like "matched pairs of glazed pots." That's the effect of staying too long in an old paradigm.

The new paradigm melts the glaze. The new paradigm gives an opportunity to break out of old forms into something new and vibrantly alive. But it doesn't stop there. The new paradigm extends out from partner-interactions to the larger arena of life-as-a-whole. In its broadest application, the new paradigm is about how to live your whole life from a stance of gratitude rather than a stance of scarcity. It's about greeting each

moment of life with an open heart rather than a judgmental mind. It asks you to express appreciation for no other reason than your decision to live a grateful life. Rather than waiting for life to bring experiences to you so that you can judge them worthy of appreciation, you initiate the new paradigm by taking a pro-active stance of gratitude toward your life-experience. You walk through life as a philanthropist instead of a supplicant, a producer instead of a consumer.

You become the generator instead of a battery. You provide your own energy instead of drawing on the energy of others. The difference is profound and comes with a magnificent surprise. The moment you choose to live life as a producer rather than a consumer of energy, you draw other people into your life who have chosen to live their lives as producers. The relationships you form with them magnifies the energy of everyone, and you get more juice than you could ever possibly imagined.