

Cheryl Clarke, M.S. LMFT | Gregory H. Clarke Sr. M.S. Ed.

THE POWER — OF THE —



4A'S

THE WORKBOOK

You can have a successful marriage, if you choose! You just need to implement the 4A's... ACCEPTANCE, APPRECIATION, AFFECTION, and AGREEMENT

Greg and Cheryl are passionate about teaching couples the tools to transform their marriage and families. This book is inspired by how they saved their marriage - when neither thought it was possible - and how they now help other married couples turn their relationship around.

Over the last 20 years, the pressure on married couples has increased dramatically. Reports show that couples who stayed married for several years were unhappy and dissatisfied with their marriage - they felt unaccepted, underappreciated, and passionless. Many couples stayed in their marriage either because of financial reasons or for the sake of their children. Greg and Cheryl's insight can help shift your married life from HURTING to HEALED so you can create the relationship of your dreams.

The purpose of this book is to help couples enrich their marriage using the 4A's method that teaches you exactly how to build and cultivate a thriving and intimate relationship with your spouse. Using hands-on exercises and practical knowledge, Greg and Cheryl will provide you with powerful tools that you can use right away to foster a successful marriage.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Greg and Cheryl Clarke are a husband-and-wife team. Better known as “the Marriage Specialists”, they share the same passion for helping couples build stronger, healthier marriages, taking them from HURTING to HEALED. Greg and Cheryl are speakers, mentors, ministers, and relationship/business coaches. They use their transcendent coaching programs to offer foundational tools and uncommon. Greg is an early childhood education teacher, ordained minister, and certified relationship/life coach. Cheryl is a licensed marriage and family therapist, ordained minister, and motivational speaker.

After being together for over 30 years, with six beautiful children, the Clarkes have a wealth of wisdom to share. Through God's promise and spiritual inventions, Greg and Cheryl Clarke are on a mission to be role models, proving that marriages can LAST with the right tools.

To learn more about taking your relationship to the next level, visit www.gregandcherylclarke.com or email them at info@gregandcherylclarke.com.

When Couples Unite, Greatness is Bound to Happen!



THE POWER OF THE 4 A'S

THE WORKBOOK

Building A Successful, Thriving Marriage
by Applying the Thoughts into Action

Cheryl Clarke, M.S. LMFT
Gregory Clarke, M.S. Ed.

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THE POWER — OF THE — 4A's

**HOW WE WENT FROM CONTEMPLATING DIVORCE
TO A SUCCESSFUL THRIVING MARRIAGE**

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is simply called - The Power of the 4 A's – The Workbook, because we not only saved our own marriage, we have helped turn other marriages around – when neither partner thought it was possible. This workbook is designed to help couples enrich their marriages by using the method of the 4 A's – which teaches you exactly what to do to build together and how to cultivate a successful, intimate relationship with your partner. Through hands-on exercises and practical wisdom, Greg and Cheryl provide powerful tools that can be implemented right away and foster a successful marriage. The most powerful key to marriage success is implementing the right tools, which you will learn while reading and applying the information in this workbook.

The pressures on married couples today have increased over the last couple of decades. Many couples who have stayed married for several years report not feeling satisfied or happy with their marriage. They report feeling unaccepted, unappreciated, and passionless. Often, people stay in relationships for financial reasons or to co-parent. This workbook is designed to shift you. You will soon realize that suffering in a marriage is a choice.

You are about to embark on and explore the 4 A's of marriage that we discovered on our journey to mastering our marriage. We believe these are the most essential tools to know and utilize if you want to thrive in or improve your marriage now. We understand how challenging it can be to be in a relationship that you think is dying. However, we believe your marriage has the potential to be great when you have the right tools.

This workbook is based on our own marriage, the years of work as couple's therapists, and our work in being marriage specialists and mentors. Together, we are a walking intervention for married couples. The concepts, tools, and knowledge we provide in this book will have a lasting impact if you make a choice today to carve out the time to create an amazing marriage.

You will find that this workbook, carefully divided into four parts and mirrors the guidance of the original book, will cause you to understand yourself and each other at a deeper level. We have created this workbook as a resource to not only understand the 4 A's but to actualize the information and tools to implement right away, which will expedite the change process in your relationship.

PART I: ACCEPTANCE

"The happiest people in life are able to be themselves. But you cannot be yourself until you accept yourself."

~ Jeff Moore

Chapter 1

THE TRUTH ABOUT SELF-ACCEPTANCE

"No amount of self-improvement can make up for any lack of self-acceptance."

~ Robert Holden

The goal of this chapter and the exercises are to enhance your own self-acceptance in a meaningful way through specific techniques. To begin this process, it is important to ask yourself the question, "Do I really want to save my marriage?" Do you have hope for your marriage? When we are struggling it can be difficult to find hope. What does hope mean? The most common definition of hope is, "to wish for, to expect, but without certainty of the fulfillment; to desire very much, but with no real assurance of getting your desire."

For example, say you hope to race in a marathon and win. Every year, marathons are held all around the world, but that hope is foolish if you never begin the practice of running and enter the race! Your hope is not realistic. We hoped to one day go back to school. We could not magically wish finishing school into existence. It wasn't going to happen! We had to make a decision to put together a plan and then execute the plan if our collective hope was to be achieved. As a result, finishing school became a reality.

Through our research, we define "hope" as a kind of uncertain, optimistic stance. "It's the feeling from using specific approaches and methods that one's desires can be achieved."

In this first chapter, you will get to know exactly where you stand, which will begin to bring clarity to your desired outcome. When you are not honest with yourself, you create restraints and roadblocks to your success. During this process, it is extremely important to be honest with yourself, because it opens up new possibilities. Each party comes into the marriage with their own personal stories. There are many different factors that can hold a person back from doing what is needed to build a solid, loving, and

passionate relationship, such as hurts from past relationships, issues with rejection, upbringing, and most of all, silent expectations.

Self-acceptance is one of the most important ingredients needed for a successful marriage. However, the truth about accepting oneself for who you are is the prerequisite to be able to accept your relationship, your partner, or anyone, truth be told. Starting with self speeds up the healing process because you gain personal insight and self-awareness of your behavioral patterns. Self-acceptance plays a major role in your decision for a healthy, happy co-existence with your partner.

We have found that when couples identify their hope levels it becomes a starting point and a gauging system to track their progress. Based on our experience, few couples are going to rank very high on the hope scale, depending on how fractured the relationship is. Many couples are unsure and hurt, which can keep them stuck, fearful of where to begin to have hope that tomorrow will be better than yesterday and that the next minute will be better than the last hour. Research suggests hope is a teachable skill (Rand and Cheavens, 2012). It has been found that a greater level of hope results in greater well-being and is vital to the success of enhanced personal relationships.

When hopelessness is present a couple might not see the point, or they may think they have done all they could do or should do to make it work, or the fault is all with the other partner

. The truth is if you are not willing to work on your relationship, then you're ultimately choosing to prolong your problems or even make them worse. If this is where you are right now, take a few moments to notice what this stance is costing you and your marriage. We believe through understanding and practicing the pathways to hope, no matter what the experience, we improve brain health for all.

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Define self-acceptance in the context of unconditional self-acceptance.
- Practice self-acceptance through visualization of hope.
- Practice self-acceptance through positive self-talk.
- Identify the connection between self-acceptance and clear communication.

Exercise 1: Rate Your Hope

Let's rate your level of hope on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 - you are really hopeful about your marriage working; 1 - you have just a glimmer of hope). What number are you in terms of hope for your marriage? Note your number below, whatever number feels truthful to you.

Take a moment to assess the number for your hope level for your marriage. Keep in mind, if you can find a glimmer of hope to make your marriage work, then it is worth fighting for. Any unhappy, mediocre, or even just an okay relationship has the potential to be amazing when the couple has the right tools and knows exactly how to use them.

How hopeful are you at this time about your level within this relationship?

Partner #1

Partner #2

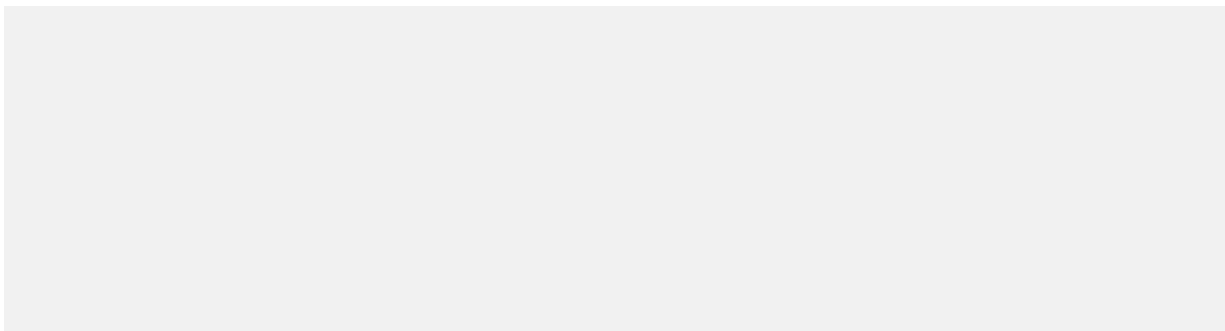
Exercise 2: Activating Self-Acceptance and Visualizing Hope

In this exercise, you will explore methods of activating your self-acceptance and hope level for the future. The purpose is to educate and equip you to have a mind shift and have the tools to maintain hope even during the most trying of times. Being hopeful is the starting point to begin to cope with things that have happened or are happening, and the willingness to solve them. Each partner should answer the questions separately and then come together and share. If you are doing this exercise alone, answer the questions and share your responses with your partner. This exercise is based on the concept of visualizing where you want to be in five years.

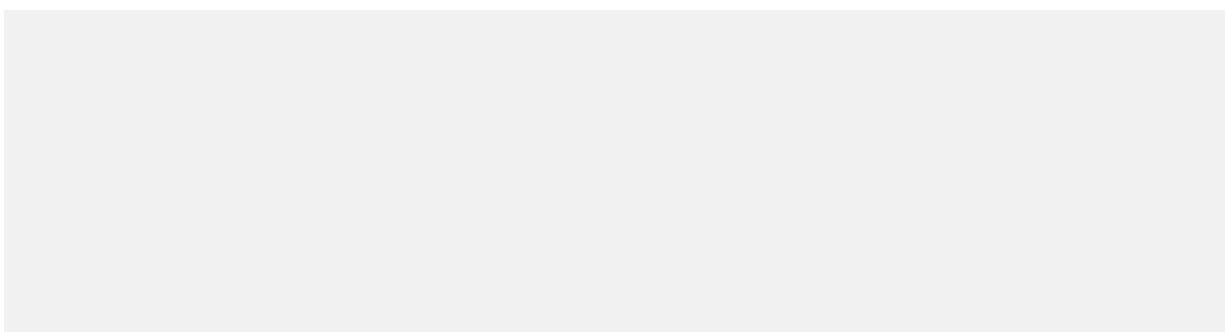
It is five years from now and you and your partner are celebrating your wedding anniversary with your closest friends and family. The gathering can be big or small and as fancy as you wish. It's your imagination! Imagine running into an old friend at a coffee shop five years from now. You are catching up on each other's lives. Your friends start clinging on the glasses, chanting "speech, speech..." Your partner stands to make a speech about what they are most proud of having you by their side. Just picture the husband/wife you want to be and act like that person at that moment as your partner begins to say everything you were longing to hear for many years. (Remember, this exercise is to activate your hope level, so it may not be reality now). Now, close your eyes and begin to visualize as clearly as you can your partner describing your amazing spirit, your personality traits and sharing about the things you have done to take your marriage to the next level.

Now, answer the following questions in the space provided.

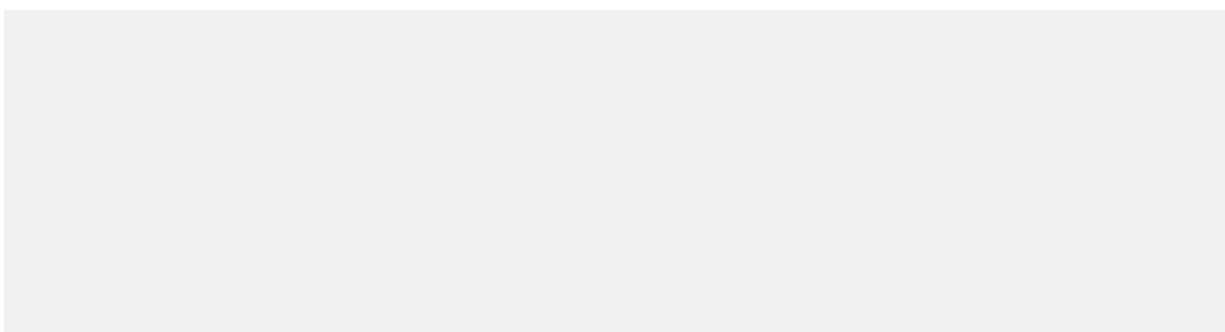
1. What were the things you visualized your partner recognized in you that you bring to the marriage?



2. What personal qualities do you hope to bring into your marriage?



3. How can you express a deeper sense of connection that shows you care on a daily basis that supports confidence, happiness and satisfaction?



Refer to this exercise as a daily reminder of hope.

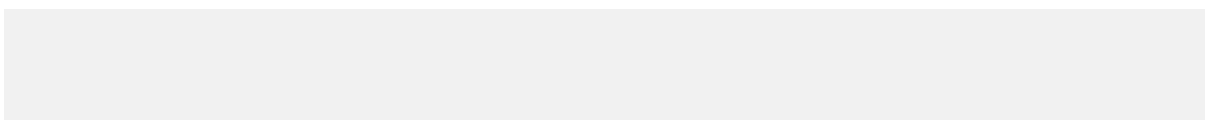
Exercise 3: Raising Self-Acceptance Through Positive Self-Talk

In this exercise, you are going to focus on showing love and gratitude for your characteristics, traits, quirks, all the things that make you who you are. You are going to learn to love yourself. For the things we don't really love about ourselves, this is an important way to quell those negative inner thoughts and commit to the practice of loving yourself, which will aid you in feeling more grounded, confident, and better able to shield you from old insecurities that no longer serve you. Learning to love these parts of yourself is a part of the acceptance and love journey.

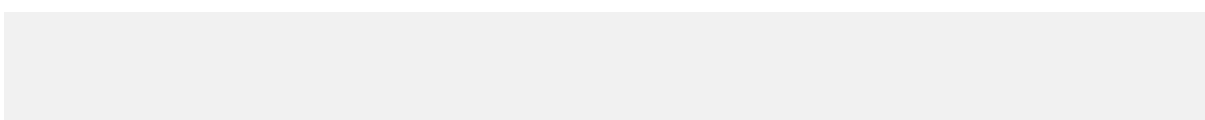
1. Make a list of the things you honor and appreciate about yourself. This can include your talents, skills, abilities, and gifts. Keep this list close to you at all times and read it when you feel like you are having a rough day. Here are some questions that can make this process easier for you:
 - What are the good characteristics I have?
 - What do I appreciate about who I am?
 - What are my strengths and traits?
2. Stand in front of a mirror and read your list aloud. Start each statement in the third person. For example:
 - *(Your Name), I love how you...*
 - *Cathy, I love how you are so considerate of stray dogs that you carry dog biscuits in your purse.*
3. Begin statements with, "*What I love about myself is my ability to [fill in the blank]*". For example:
 - *What I love about myself is my ability to learn anything in a matter of hours.*
 - *What I love about myself is my ability to replace negative thoughts with productive thoughts.*

Here are 10 things I love about myself:

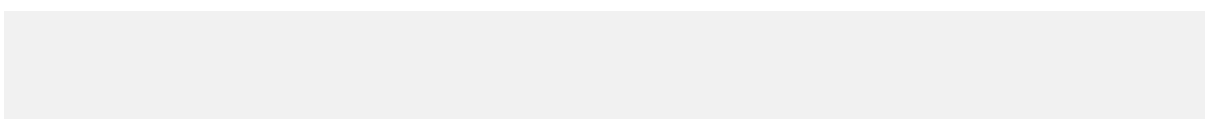
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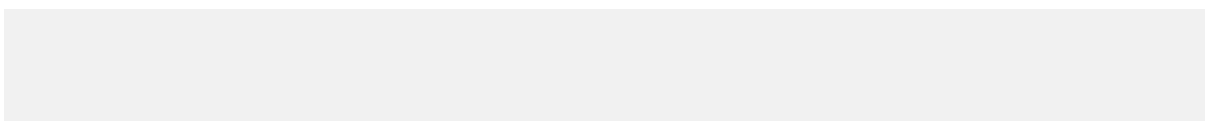
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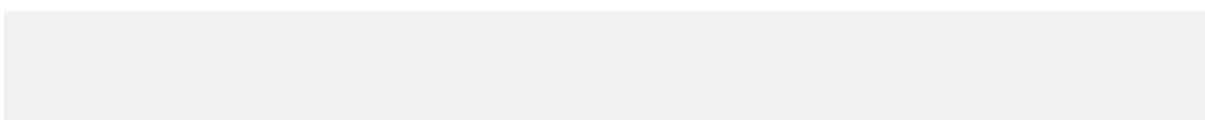
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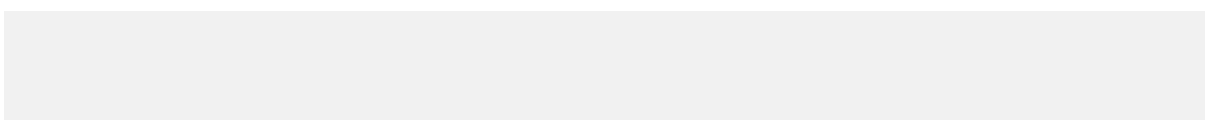
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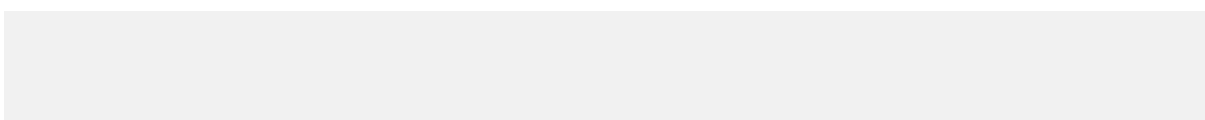
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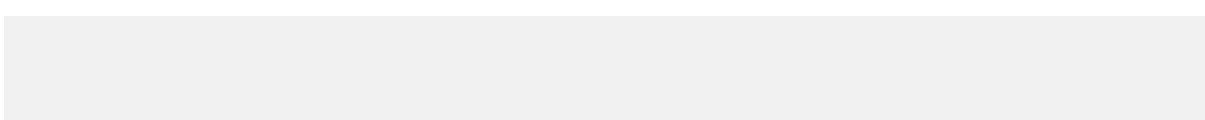
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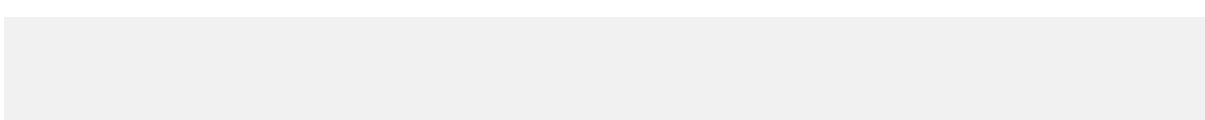
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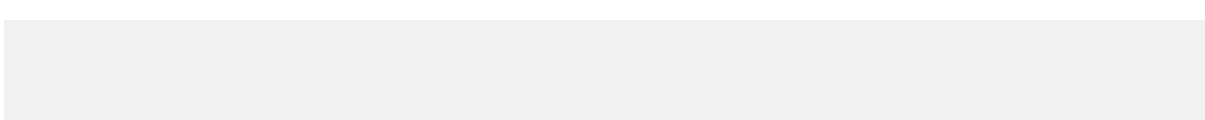
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Chapter 2

LEARNING TO ACCEPT YOUR PARTNER

The "honeymoon phase" of the relationship is chemically mediated. When the love drug wears off, both parties begin to see differences that may not always be accepted when first encountered. Successful marriages are those where two people celebrate their complementary differences while maintaining their individuality and values. The goal for a successful marriage is this interdependence as opposed to co-dependency.

Interdependence centers on the self-acceptance you practiced in the last chapter. It is impossible to be interdependent without a strong sense of self-acceptance. The fairy tale of happily ever after, living like a princess or prince without challenge, development, or struggle must give way to the reality of growth, learning, and self-development. The more well-formed your identity, the more authentic and independent, and the more secure you are, the more likely you are to obtain interdependence when you engage with another healthy person. Acceptance of your partner begins with the confirmation of your self-acceptance.

Self-acceptance is like bringing a brand-new car to the marriage relationship. The car may not have all the latest features like power windows and remote starter, but it is functional, sleek, and your pick for the task at hand. As your relationship progresses, you will notice that the tasks required may be difficult for the car you brought into the marriage. You may find that you need to carry more items or tow. You may find that where you live requires a remote starter to warm up the car on cold mornings. You may find that you need a four-wheel drive. You may even find that you must trade in your car for a different model that comes standard with the features you require.

The car in our analogy is your self-acceptance, not the marriage. A marriage relationship should never replace your sense of self. Your sense of self, growth and development should never be considered as a one-for-all product. You can, will, and must evolve as you live through your life. Recognition of that reality better suits you to grow along with another person.

You enter the marriage with brand-new self-esteem, sense of self, confidence, and vision. Everyone is not at the same level of health and self-acceptance, so your self may not feel new, shiny, or healthy. That is not a problem because growth and development are required either way. You may need to help your partner carry burdens that you did not assist in creating. You may discover that you take time to warm up to new people whereas your partner engages gregariously. You may find that you want to update your style of dress. You may find that you want to engage a professional and find a new level of self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-actualization. All these put you in a perfect position for interdependence. The greater your commitment and comfort with growth, the more ready you are to share with your partner in your health, happiness, and discovery.

The greatest challenge to self-acceptance is a prolonged pattern of self-denial stemming from trauma or lack of healthy relationship patterns. Learned helplessness, people-pleasing, perfectionism, compulsive behavior, despair, and addiction are several of the unsustainable characteristics that can be brought to a relationship and lead to co-dependency. For each partner, the challenges can be overcome with communication, commitment to autonomy and self-determination, and professional help-seeking when needed. Again, the car does not matter as much as the acceptance that allows the vehicle to grow and develop as it needs to change. As long as the destination is shared between you and your partner, you possess what it takes to thrive and reach there together.

At the conclusion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Contrast interdependence and co-dependency.
- List the qualities that support interdependence.

Exercise: For each of the following options, circle the description that BEST represents your relationship. Compare your answers to those of your spouse. Discuss the Co-Dependent descriptions you find and brainstorm ways to balance for greater interdependence.

	The Interdependent Couple	The Co-Dependent Couple
1	Mutual sense of regard for oneself and each other; balanced.	One person does most of the giving and receives little support or help in return.
2	Help promotes growth, learning, and self-sufficiency.	Enabling is disguised as help and creates dependency and stuns personal growth.
3	Takes responsibility for their own feelings, actions, and contributions to the marriage.	Enmeshment or merging of identity and feelings so that neither person functions like a whole, independent person.
4	Feels free to be your authentic self. A sense of being your own separate, independent person.	Loses sight of your interests, goals, values, and instead, does and says what your partner wants.
5	Fully experiences your own feelings.	Tends to absorb other people's feelings and suppress your own.
6	You know you have value even when others are upset with you.	Relies on your partner to make you feel worthy.
7	Feels safe and secure in your relationship.	Fears rejection, criticism, and abandonment.
8	Ability to disagree or say "no" without guilt.	Fear of conflict, poor boundaries, and expectation of perfection.
9	Honesty and the ability to admit mistakes promotes growth.	Denial and defensiveness keep things stagnant.

* © Sharon Martin, LCSW

Chapter 3

STEPS TO ACCEPT YOUR PARTNER FOR WHO THEY ARE

Acceptance is learning the necessary tools to have conversations with your partner and demonstrate shared respect, love, and joy in working together to make each other feel good about the relationship. Being in a committed relationship requires personal growth and couple growth. You do not need to abandon the relationship because some of your partner's characteristics are uncomfortable for you. The first step is to identify where your expectations originate. Next, determine whether those expectations are agreements made between your partner and you or were they unspoken requests that were assumed. Assumptions are never useful but are especially damaging to relationships when matched with expectations.

Also, realize that certain agreements are explicit in the marriage contract whether reminded daily or not. Andrea Miller writes in her book, *Radical Acceptance*:

Your partner doesn't have the license to take advantage of you. ...in no way are we suggesting that your partner get a pass for bad behavior, such as habitual lying, habitual cheating, habitual stealing, physical or verbal abuse, or any behavior that is threatening or dangerous.

These examples of poor behavior go against the foundation of a healthy marriage. These and others discussed and understood hurtful actions should be avoided. When they do come up, they should be addressed rather than accepted.

Most often, the challenges experienced in marriage relationships are not of the discussed, understood, or agreed upon variety. They are often what is called "common sense."

"It is common sense not to leave your socks lying around on the floor."

"It is common sense that the wife will cook and clean the house."

"It is common sense that every husband knows how to change a flat tire."

"It is common sense that every wife knows how to sew."

None of the above is common sense. Someone must teach those behaviors, and someone must learn them. Entering adulthood, consider that your partner may have been taught, learned, but dismissed those behaviors as an unhappy childhood chore. Their happiness is pegged upon choosing to do the opposite of those behaviors. The reengagement of those behaviors is not as simple as requesting them. It would be uncomfortable for the behaviors to be expected. It would be shaming to call those behaviors common sense.

If your partner is not as tidy as you would like and leaves their socks lying around, or your partner has a tendency to be late, talks a lot or not enough, viewing their traits as "problems" or "flaws" can most times result in an argument. Recognize that the argument is not about the "rightness" of the task. The argument is about the autonomy of the adult you are conversing with. When confronted with failure do rise to an expectation, most adults initially feel attacked. Insistence on the righteousness of the requirement only deepens the sense of shame at the failure. Another option is to explore the origins of your expectations and the experience your partner has of the behaviors.

You must learn how to shift your views. The pursuit of improvement and personal growth is a couple's pursuit, not a proposition where one partner grows, raises, or instructs the other. All roads lead to everyone feeling unconditionally accepted. Greater knowledge of self and knowledge of your partner will yield understanding and a foundation for shared expectations and negotiated views of situations. Even the smallest step you take today can transform your relationship. You can go from hurting to healed.

By the conclusion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify your expectations and where they come from.
- Identify your Triggers & Negative Spin Cycle tendencies.
- Explain a Present Focus as an ability to focus on the present rather than past pain.
- Practice empathy as a pause to consider how your partner may feel and to communicate acceptance and active listening.

Exercise 1: The First Step to Take in Accepting Your Partner

In connection with what you have learned so far, answer the following questions, and then share your responses with your partner.

1. What personal qualities do I see in my partner?

2. What attitude am I willing to cultivate toward my partner when I am triggered?

3. How will I show acceptance of my partner after he/she has made a mistake?

4. What stops me from having a successful marriage right now?

5. I believe our marriage can be successful when I begin to _____
my partner.

Exercise 2: The Second Step to Take in Accepting Your Partner

In this exercise, you will learn to identify and verbalize the smallest steps in accepting your partner and the ways you would like to be accepted as well in the relationship.

Use the following to guide yourself and your partner to take the smallest step this week.

In the space below, list seven small things that your partner can do daily to make you feel more accepted.

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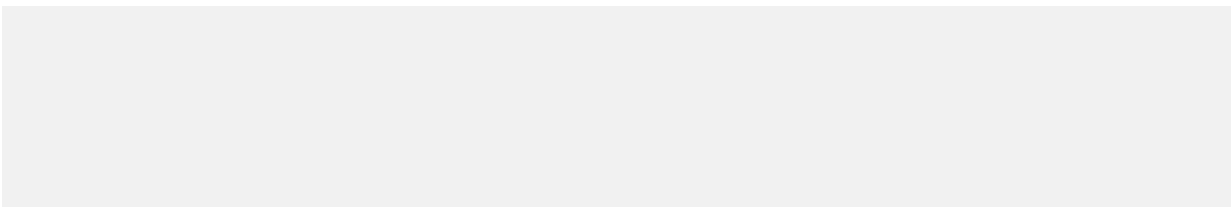
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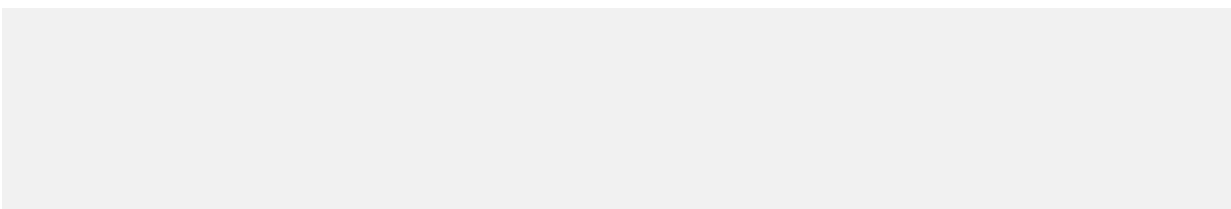
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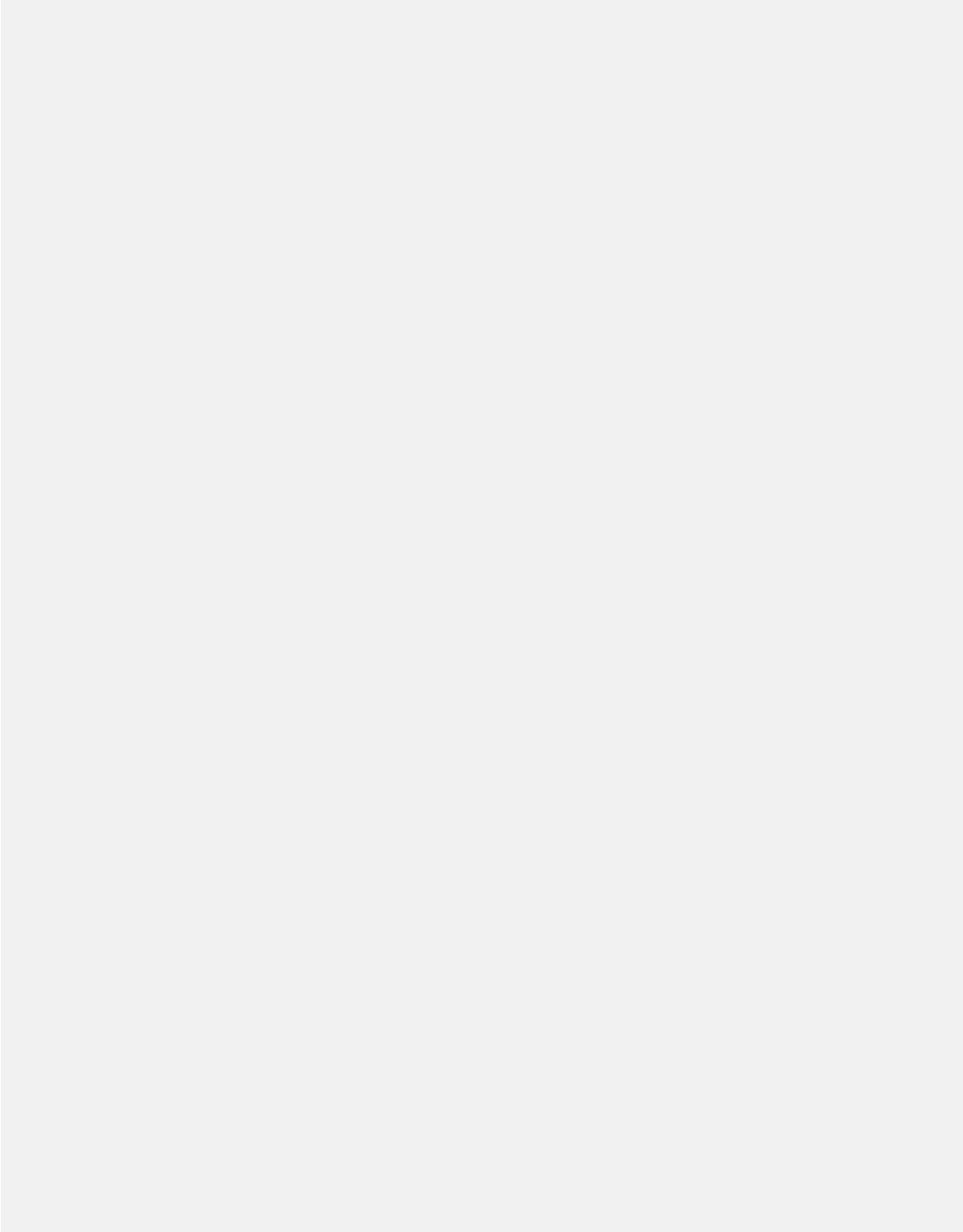


7.



SECTION I - TAKEAWAYS

List below your takeaways you have learned from this section.



PART II: APPRECIATION

"A moment of gratitude makes a difference in your attitude."

~ Bruce Wilkinson

Chapter 4

UNDERSTANDING APPRECIATION

As a marriage progresses naturally, it is common to take a few things for granted. This happens in every marriage, especially the ones that are going well. Taking things for granted is a byproduct of the comfort, familiarity, and compatibility felt within a relationship. It can feel like happiness to the partner who is experiencing the benefits while feeling like selfishness by the partner performing the tasks.

You can always find a person complaining about not feeling appreciated at some point within his/her relationship. It is natural, but it certainly will not cultivate a healthy, thriving relationship. Appreciation is the recognition and the joy of the good qualities of someone or something. It must be cultivated intentionally because comfort lulls us into a sense of calm and an inclination not to rock the boat. If it is not broken, don't fix it. Right? But...this is not about fixing brokenness. It is about celebrating what is going well. Gratitude is not about making something bad into something better. Gratitude is about throwing a party on top of what is already good. Of course, adding a party often makes good into great, and so it is with gratitude.

Appreciation exercises are best implemented daily. Every day you and your partner will tell each other three things you appreciate one after the other. You must maintain eye contact while speaking to each other, and the one on the receiving end should only say, "Thank you." To end the exercise, discuss how it made you feel to have given and received appreciation and note whether you heard anything that was new or not.

The power of daily anything is well documented. The construct results in the building of a habit. Habits are not just about repetition. Habits are about the cognitive shifts that occur when those habits are internalized.

You can take the example of affirmations, useful here for self-acceptance as well as the appreciation of your partner. Speaking positive affirmations to yourself daily can significantly impact your mood as well as your achievement. Affirmations in the context of prayer, meditation, and other mindfulness have been shown to positively affect health outcomes for patients under medical care, students in classrooms, and elders in nursing homes. Daily mental health and wellbeing practice perfects health and happiness.

It is the same with your daily gratitude. In the context of a relationship, the thoughts become subject to the positivity communicated in gratitude. Any negative thoughts or questions about the relationship are answered by the communications of gratitude. The result is the ability of each partner to identify their value based on the memory of gratitude expression in those moments when self-assessment of value wanes.

By the conclusion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Define appreciation and the impact it has on a relationship.
- Install appreciation as a daily habit in the marriage.

Exercise 1: *Thank You, Honey*

In this exercise, we want you to start with the basics, "*Thank You*," the one thing across the world of common courtesy that you may have lost concerning your partner. Think about the things that your partner has done for you just **TODAY** that have gone without a simple thank you. Look back at the things that your partner has done for you.

Thank You, Honey Worksheet

1. I want to thank you for _____.
2. I want to thank you for _____.
3. I want to thank you for _____.
4. I want to thank you for _____.
5. I want to thank you for _____.
6. I want to thank you for _____.
7. I want to thank you for _____.
8. I want to thank you for _____.
9. I want to thank you for _____.
10. I want to thank you for _____.

Exercise 2: RWTR Worksheet

In this exercise, we want you to remember things that your partner has done in the past that inspired your appreciation. Follow the **RWTR** process to recall, write, tell, and repeat.

R.W.T.R.

- **1st - Recall them**
- **2nd - Write them**
- **3rd - Tell them**
- **4th - Repeat 1-3 over and over**

I am going to be more conscious of thanking you more.

1. I remember appreciation for

2. I remember appreciation for

3. I remember appreciation for

4. I remember appreciation for

5. I remember appreciation for

6. I remember appreciation for

7. I remember appreciation for

8. I remember appreciation for

9. I remember appreciation for

10. I remember appreciation for

Chapter 5

IMPLEMENTING APPRECIATION IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

In this lesson, you must put on your thinking caps and contemplate things you truly appreciate about your partner and ways you would like to be appreciated. Think of what and how you want to be appreciated by your partner. Consider what you would like to be appreciated for. Begin with those things that you do well that may get attention even if not the level of acknowledgment that you desire. Include those things that you have begun or have entered with trepidation expanding your mind and comfort. Consider how you want to be told, shown, or otherwise communicated with. Not just the words, but the tone and the feeling expressed by your partner. The showing of appreciation in gifts, time, service, touch or however you want it expressed. Think of the contexts, settings, and witnesses you want around if that matters to you. Know and accept that this is you and You require no explanation.

Now, look at your behavior. Are you giving what you are expecting? Not the exact desire of what and how, but the allowance of the other person to have their own desires of what and how without the need for explanation. Many couples make the mistake of showing their partner appreciation the way they would want to be appreciated without ever asking. Remember, never assume. You can be the best at expressing appreciation but express it in a way that is neutral or unnerving to your partner.

For example, I remember a couple who experienced some challenges around the gifting of flowers. The wife loved receiving flowers. They were a welcomed holiday, anniversary, or just-because gift. The husband voiced that he did not understand the fascination with flowers, but he gave them anyway because of the joy it brought to his partner. The same was expressed to the wife. One birthday, the wife brought home roses to surprise the husband. The husband was disappointed. From his perspective, the wife had not listened and sought to provide her happiness to him without considering his feelings. From her perspective, the husband was ungrateful further deepening her feelings of inadequacy and failure. The birthday celebration

turned from joyous occasion to a couple's lesson about what and how appreciation could and should be shown.

Some characteristics that you may appreciate about your partner are common to romantic relationships, but each couple has their unique desires for what and how of expression of appreciation. Think of the major categories as including Appearance, Intellect, Engagement, and Character. Appearance characteristics include beauty, style, and presentation. It is basically anything that can be described in shapes, colors, symmetry, or other visual cues. Intellect includes characteristics like intelligence, wit, creativity, and decision-making. Engagement is how one enters and interacts with people. It includes personality, humor, initiation/reservation, and helpfulness. Character covers those qualities that are observed over time like resilience, passion, courage, and dedication.

The appreciation exercises in this lesson are designed to build a connection between you and your partner and teach you how to give and receive appreciation.

By the conclusion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify the characteristics of your partner that you desire.
- Communicate stories that illustrate behaviors associated with characteristics you appreciate.
- Share ways that you feel appreciated by your partner.

Exercise 1: *Things I Appreciate About You*

Directions:

1. Make a checklist of the important characteristics you think your partner should possess.
2. Make a checklist of all the characteristics you appreciate about your partner.

Below is an example of characteristics you may appreciate about your partner:

I appreciate your patience.

I appreciate your sense of humor.

I appreciate your thoughtfulness.

I appreciate your intelligence.

I appreciate your willingness to help.

I appreciate your dedication.

I appreciate your resilience.

I appreciate your passion.

I appreciate your tenacity.

I appreciate your beauty.

I appreciate your courage.

Exercise 2: *Appreciation Stories*

Directions:

For each item you listed, briefly describe an actual incident that illustrates this characteristic of your partner.

Things I Appreciate About You

1. I appreciate your _____
2. I appreciate your _____
3. I appreciate your _____
4. I appreciate your _____
5. I appreciate your _____
6. I appreciate your _____
7. I appreciate your _____
8. I appreciate your _____
9. I appreciate your _____
10. I appreciate your _____

Exercise 3: *Appreciation to Me Worksheet*

Directions:

List as many ways as possible that your partner shows you appreciation in ways that you value and are inspired by. Next, share your list with your partner. Let him/her know they are appreciated by you!

Ways to Show Appreciation to Me

- 1. I feel appreciated when _____
- 2. I feel appreciated when _____
- 3. I feel appreciated when _____
- 4. I feel appreciated when _____
- 5. I feel appreciated when _____
- 6. I feel appreciated when _____
- 7. I feel appreciated when _____
- 8. I feel appreciated when _____
- 9. I feel appreciated when _____
- 10. I feel appreciated when _____

Chapter 6

UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF APPRECIATION

It is no secret that the busyness of your lives may have caused you to get away from having a little fun with each other. Time is the great difference maker with couples. Your heart can be found wherever you spend the most time. Quality time refers to the reality that time spent is not the only requirement of a healthy relationship. The time spent must have certain quality components. Well spent, the time has benefits for each of the parties involved. Best spent, the benefits are shared for mutual satisfaction and a foundation for future time spent. The result is a desire to spend the rest of recorded time together.

Take some time with your partner to recharge your relationship. Recharging will promote your communication and shared experience of appreciation. Be intentional to create dialogue and a feeling that the communication of appreciation is always present. Ask your partner relevant questions besides the ordinary question of, "How was work?" Also, make sure you are not communicating as a chore or obligation. Watch your questioning to ensure that they are not coming across as an inquisition or an interrogation. In most interview scenarios, you want to ask open-ended questions that allow for elaboration. In daily couple's communication, the balance is less open-ended, but not closed either. Ask questions that can be answered with short phrases. This allows your partner to elaborate if desired, but not feel pressured to explain or relive the experiences of the day. Short answers are enough to stimulate your curiosity without limiting your understanding. Make a habit of asking for elaboration in ways that are not demanding. For example, "Why was that?" can be replaced with, "I would like to hear more about that if you're up to it."

Couples should not assume that showing appreciation for a day, a week, or a month will be enough. Let it become a way of life within the fabric of your relationship. Develop a genuine interest in their functioning, mental health, relationships, aspirations, and experiences. Find the commonalities between their level of exertion and your need for recreation. Discover ways to recharge both separately and together. Find your own routine of solitude

and your shared experience of rejuvenation. Be a team that prepares alone according to their strengths and weaknesses and together according to their roles and contributions. The outcomes of such a lifestyle will be your happiness and a greater sense of companionship.

Acknowledging the thoughts and contributions of your partner with appreciation shows that they matter. Begin to move through this process together and start to build an environment of appreciation practices that will create a relationship that can stand the test of time. That is the other important point about time. It moves on regardless of how we utilize it. Sometimes, you will get stuck in the ruts of your own omission or commission. In these situations, it is critical that you develop the ability to pivot or shift. Consider that your relationship will be improved as you are able to shift outlook, mood, understanding, bond, and trajectory. Each has a possible positive and a possible negative when engaged intentionally or left to time. Engage them intentionally for best results.

In this lesson, you and your partner will begin to develop your appreciation/communication skillset by asking questions. When a couple's communication skills are weak, misunderstandings will increase, leaving little room for appreciation. These communication exercises push you out of comfortable patterns. Begin implementing these new skills. Have fun with them.

By the conclusion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify the shifts that appreciation makes possible in relationships.
- Identify ways you will show appreciation in the context of shifting relationships.

Exercise 1: *Develop Your Appreciation/Communication Skills Challenge*

Directions: Answer the following questions. Then, try to come up with different questions on your own. Feel free to use these examples. Have fun with your partner.

1. What was the most exciting happening today?

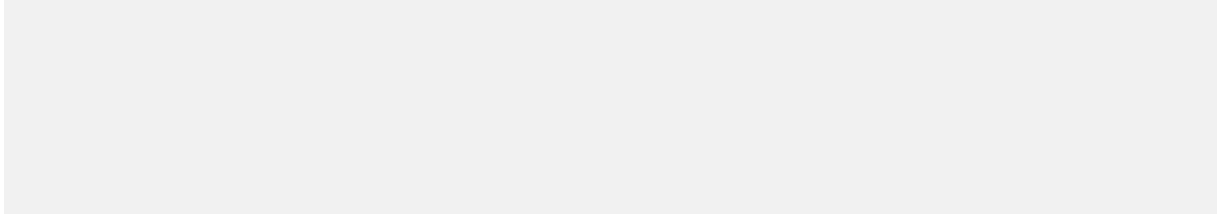
2. What annoyed or frustrated you today?

3. Did you complete everything you intended to accomplish today?

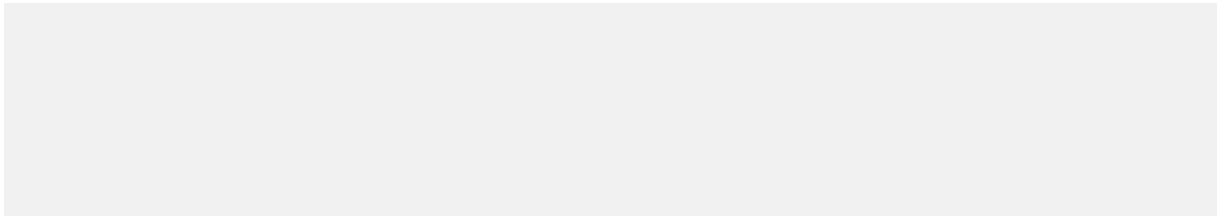
4. What do you identify as your strengths?

5. What do you identify as my strengths?

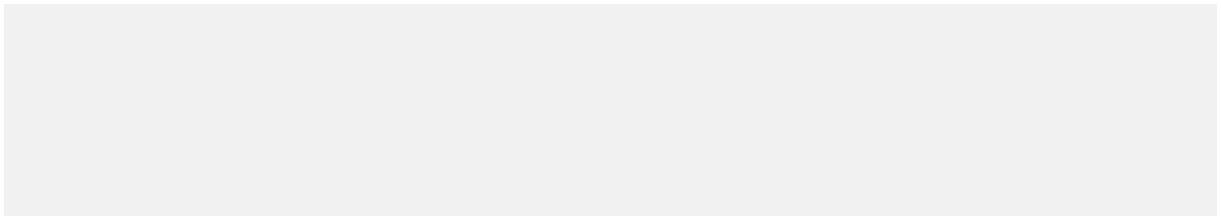
6. What do you identify as your weaknesses?



7. What do you identify as my weaknesses?



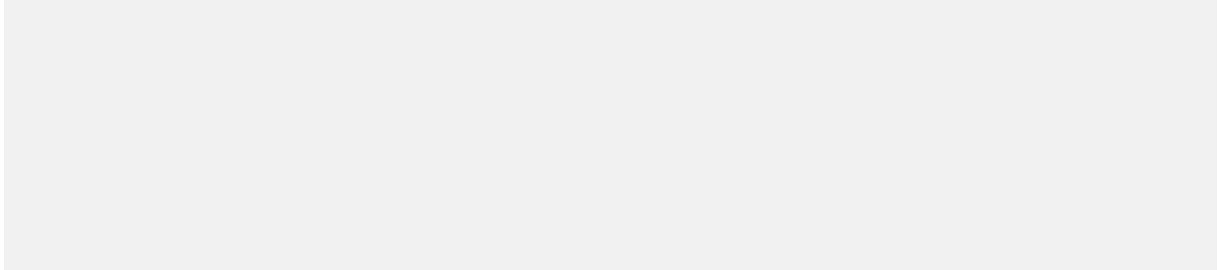
8. If you could pick a favorite movie, TV show, book, song, what would it be?



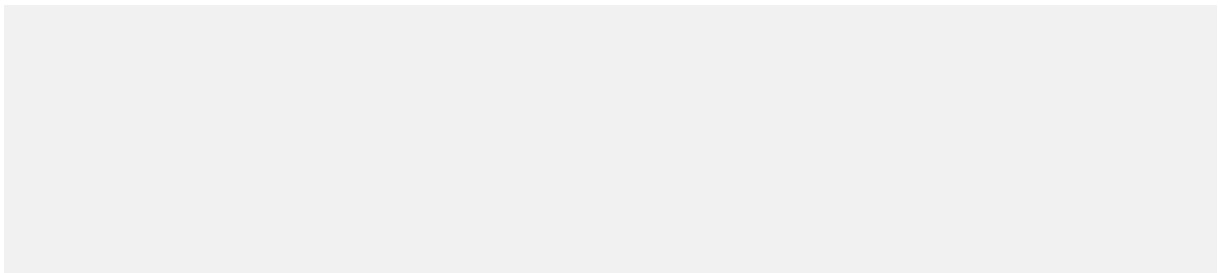
Exercise 2: *How You Will Shift?*

Directions: For each of the following shifts, describe how you may show appreciation to achieve the shift.

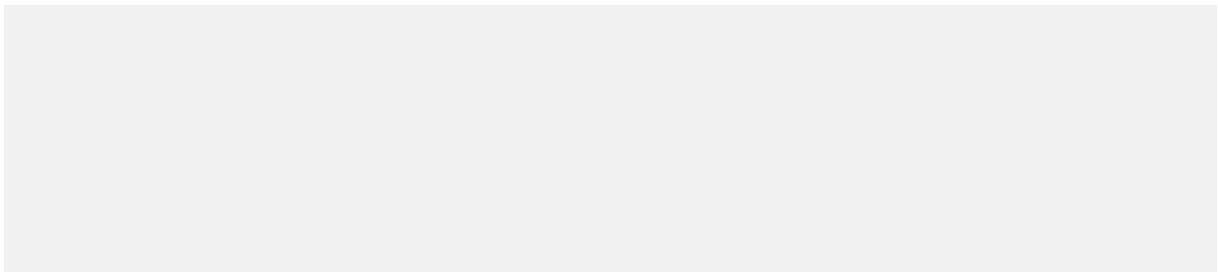
Shift Outlook from Self to Us



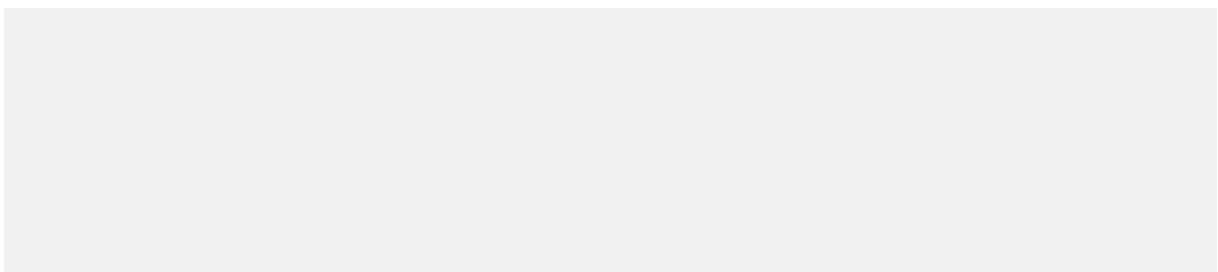
Shift Mood from Neutral to Joyful



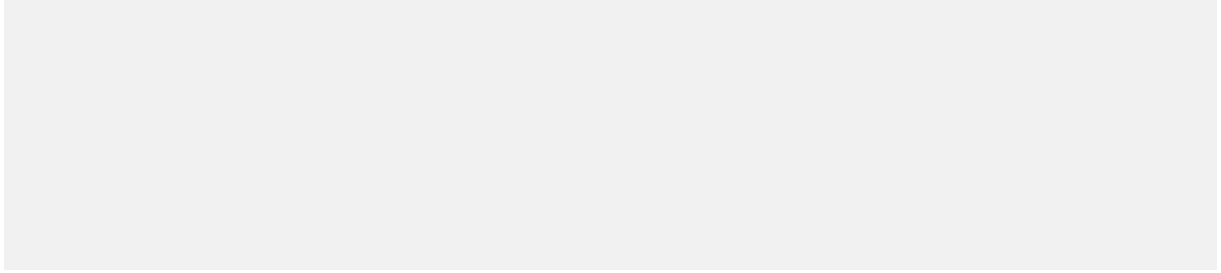
Shift Understanding from Hesitation to Trust



Shift Your Bond from Restless to Comfortable



Shift Trajectory from Pedestrian to Extraordinary



SECTION II - TAKEAWAYS

List below your takeaways you have learned from this section.

