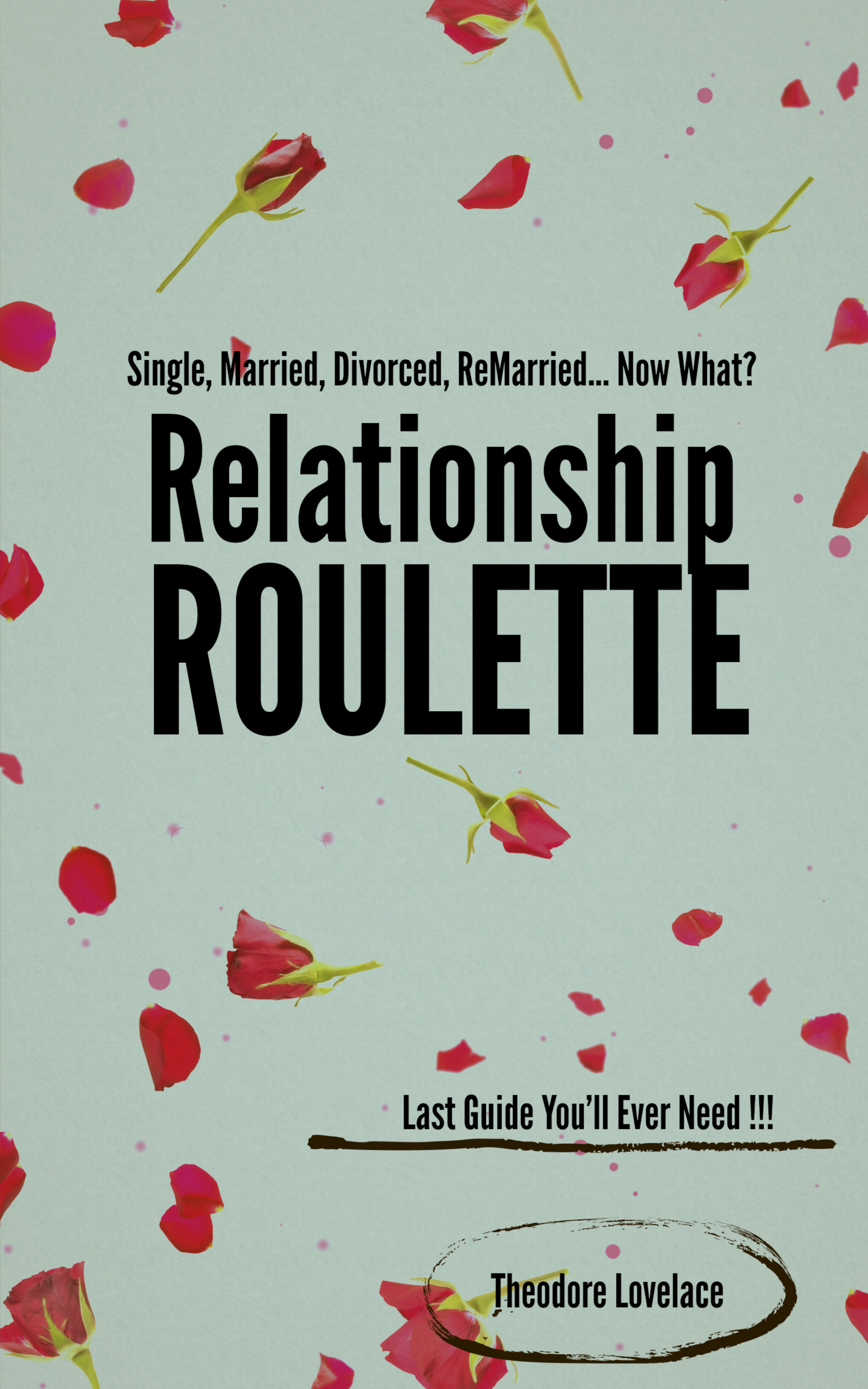




Single, Married, Divorced, ReMarried... Now What?

Relationship ROULETTE

Last Guide You'll Ever Need !!!

Theodore Lovelace

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wonderful children who have motivated me to great heights- Ronnie (deceased), Hakeem, Joshua, Gabrielle, Caleb, Judea: Throughout your life always remember how deeply and unwaveringly I love you because a hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove.....

But the world may be different because I was important in your lives.

- **Dad**

Foreward

Relationally, America is in a potentially disastrous decline. Marriages falling apart after 10, 20, 30, and sometimes even 40 years. Husbands and fathers and now wives and mothers literally walking out on their own children. The divorce rate is now beginning to approach 60 percent. Relationships have become similar to car lots, first you buy one model and when you get tired of that one you trade it in for another model, and then you trade it in for another model.... ad in•fi•ni•tum . And in this process we adults are so busy satiating our own selfish desires we are completely and totally neglecting the deep emotional traumas this relational madness is causing us, our children and families, and ultimately society as a whole

Relationship Roulette explores the mistakes most people make throughout the stages of being single, married, divorced, and re-married. This easy-to-follow guide will help you understand the most common danger areas and give you the tools you need to navigate your relationships, as well as help you answer the question “Now What?”, no matter what stage you are in or what you are looking for.

Relationship Roulette

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Introduction

American society is blessed with free speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and – on an interpersonal level – the freedom to choose who we date, how we conduct ourselves in our relationships, who and when we marry, and if we want that marriage to continue. We have the freedom to divorce, remarry, have children with or without a spouse, or remain single forever without societal repercussion. Along with our freedom, we also have an increased susceptibility for error; our freedom of choice allows us to choose poorly, regret decisions and act on that regret, and ultimately take chances we would never take if we didn't have that freedom to end our relationships. So, why do so many of us play roulette with our love lives? And what are the dangerous decisions – where is the bullet?

Each stage of our “romantic life” lends itself to specific weaknesses in thinking, emotional reaction, and judgment. Our freedoms lead us to hold on to unrealistic expectations; they lead us to behave in reckless ways that hamper our ability to build and maintain strong, healthy relationships. Whether you have just started dating and speed-clean your home before your mate arrives, or you have been married for over a decade and still say “everything is fine”, even when it's not, chances are that you are playing roulette – and eventually, the bullet will find the barrel and destroy the relationship.

This book is designed to help you avoid some of the games we play that ultimately cause our relationships to end. You will learn to engage in active decision making, to spot the choices that can lead to emotional fall-outs, and to protect yourself from falling into the dangerous game of “Relationship Roulette” – whether you are single and searching, in a relationship, married, divorced, re-married, or wondering....”Now What?”.

Chapter One

Single

So you're single. You're expending thought, energy, emotion, and time into finding that special someone. It may seem, at this point, that there isn't anything that you can do to jeopardize your future happiness, but you are mistaken. While the "fishing" process seems innocuous, there are many games we play at this stage that set the foundation for failure. The way we dress, how we speak, and the stories we tell, all have an impact on our futures. Let's take a look at a couple of examples.

* * *

Amanda is a brilliant 23-year-old college student. She spends most of her time in sweat pants and t-shirts studying in her dorm, but has realized that she really would like a committed relationship. Every other Saturday night, she puts on one of three party dresses and goes out to the clubs with her friends. Amanda believes that is where she will meet Mr. Right, so she puts her best foot forward. She giggles and dumbs down her conversation in order to meet what she believes are the expectations of the men she is interested in. She meets, on average, two men a night, and will have a date with one of them per month. Over a year, Amanda will become involved in two to three relationships that will ultimately fail.

Chris is a 25-year-old college graduate who is a new employee at a large corporation and is working hard to move up the corporate ladder. He works 45-50 hours per week, and plays hard on the weekends. He has an active dating life, but is starting to become interested in a more serious relationship. Like Amanda, he is hoping to meet Ms. Right in one of the clubs he and his friends frequent. He puts away the business suit, and puts on jeans and a stylish shirt he believes will attract girls. He laughs loud and is exuberant with his friends, and when he sees a girl he is interested in, he attempts to engage in conversation led by her reactions to his questions. He exchanges phone numbers with an average of five women each night he goes out, will call back one, and dates on average two per month. Over a year, Chris will become involved in two to three relationships that will ultimately fail.

* * *

In the background of the dating world live those individuals who are *not* looking for actual relationships. These men and women just want to have fun – they want to dance, drink, have meaningless sex, and move on; or spend very platonic time doing the activities they love with no romantic interaction. Failing to realize these people exist, and acknowledge their impact on our lives, is where many individuals fall into the first roulette game of dating: Attraction to the player.

Amanda and Chris enjoy going to the clubs, and they enjoy the highly charged interactions that the clubbing environment creates, but most of the people they will meet have no real interest in long-term relationships. The reason behind the confusion is two-fold. First, Amanda and Chris are out of their normal life space and both are playing the role of fun-loving partiers, when really their responsibilities don't allow for that kind of lifestyle. Second, they are attempting to find relationship material in an environment that encourages short-term interactions.

Clubs and bars, while fun, rarely attract people who have made a deliberate decision on what they want out of their love lives. In fact, most clubbers come in two varieties: Those just looking to have fun and in the current dating vernacular..... “get laid”, and those looking to have fun but secretly/desperately hoping they will find more. The danger is when the hopeful meets a great player and gets emotionally attached; this is why it is dangerous for anyone looking for a serious relationship to “shop” in a club. Many people who are just having fun are great dates! They are charismatic, energetic, and fun to be around. For someone looking for a long-term partner, the player can seem like a great catch; unfortunately, if they aren't looking for a relationship, they can't be “caught”, and chances are, if they did want a relationship, it wouldn't be with someone they met on a night out in the club – simply because going to the club is meant to find short-term flings. It's best to dodge that bullet by keeping expectations of club relationships low and in perspective; great for having fun, but not likely to be long-term.

For many, being single is a whirlwind of ups and downs, excitement and disappointment. We go out, we meet a great person, we get excited about the potential, we find out they really aren't what we're looking for, and we do it all over again. It is a self-perpetuating cycle that can be exhausting and depressing, but it doesn't need to be. If we

can put it all into perspective, and control our expectations, being single can be rewarding, fulfilling, and fun, just as it should be.

Unfortunately, one group of singles has a little harder road to travel. Single parents not only have to deal with the time constraints of parenting – which makes meeting people difficult, and building relationships even more difficult – there are often financial strains and a constant battery of needs being thrown at them. If you're a single parent, it is very important to figure out a way to focus some of your energy on your own growth and future. Single parents must carry more weight and responsibility, but that doesn't mean life is over. The first step is the same – what do you want?

To make it easier to manage, think of it this way: Single people have three choices:

1. Focus completely on self-development and survival and not date at all.
2. Enjoy short-term interactions and “play the field” until the desire to settle down emerges.
3. Actively look for a long-term partner.

Unfortunately, most of us live our lives in the grey areas between the choices, because we are not *deliberate* in how we live our lives. Too often, single people simply “go with the flow” of their dating lives. This approach disengages us from what we really want; it disallows us from having a say in the direction our lives take, so the first game of “Relationship Roulette” most of us play is with ourselves. In order to be satisfied with our personal lives, we need to be honest with ourselves about what we want. You have to be able to say, “I’m ready to work at having a real relationship”, or “I’m not at all interested in being committed to anyone”.

Once we are honest with ourselves, and a deliberate choice is made, we can embark on living that choice. For those who are not interested in a relationship, it's important to make sure that the people we engage with understand our position. It is also very important that the decision to remain un-attached is deliberate, or the outcome is ultimately disappointment and failure.

When the decision to actively search for a long-term partner is made, it is best to invest some thought into what we really want.

- What qualities are important to you?

- What kind of lifestyle do you want to lead with your partner?
- How much emotional energy are you willing to put into a relationship?
- Are you looking for a long-term light and fun relationship where each of you continues your own lives independently, or are you looking for someone you can move in with and eventually marry?
- As a single parent, think about how much contact you want your partner to have with your kids.

Be deliberate. Think about your ideal situation; visualize and fantasize about what the perfect day, week, month, and year would look like for you. Think about the qualities that are important to you:

- What type of education level and employment?
- Do you prefer a homebody or someone who is very active?
- What kinds of activities are important to you?
- Is religious belief and/or activity important?
- Do you want someone who will be actively involved in helping you with your children?

Only when we clearly understand what we want, can we actively pursue it, so make an honest list. Use that list as a guide; choose places that are more likely to attract the type of people you want to meet, and ask questions that will help you learn if the people you interact with will meet your standards.

The best way to meet someone compatible for a long-term relationship is simply to do the things you love to do. There are activity groups for almost everything, including single parent groups. Become involved in activities that appeal to you – it is guaranteed that anyone you meet will have at least one common passion.

* * *

In our example, Amanda and Chris both make the deliberate decision to look for long-term relationships. They still go to the clubs with their friends, but both stop looking for anyone to commit to in that environment. Because of that choice, they can enjoy the people they meet more, with less expectation; the weight of “finding” someone special in the club is lifted, and they have more fun. Instead, they start paying attention to people in places they frequent during their regular days. Amanda pays more attention to classmates and to men on campus, as well as at the bookstore she frequents. Chris starts paying

attention when he is at the coffee shop in his building, and at women around the office complex. Both see the people in their normal day-to-day environments with a new perspective, because they are able to acknowledge that those people have a greater chance of meeting their standards.

They both also start looking for ways to become involved in things they are passionate about. While they continue to go on light dates with people they meet at the clubs, their perspective has changed and they have no unrealistic expectations. They have fun dates, and because they know what they want and their expectations are clear, they avoid the disappointment of each date not being “the one”.

* * *

Once you’ve made the decision to look deliberately for someone who will meet your specific desires, the harder work begins. We are all programmed to put our best foot forward at the beginning of a relationship. We want our new date to like us, to think we are funny, witty, engaging, positive, and enjoyable to be around. We often refuse to share anything that we believe could make us look bad, and we don’t ask questions that could make our date look bad. Many people also have a natural “chameleon response”; we have the tendency to mirror the personality in front of us, right down to likes and dislikes. So....what really happens, is two people get together with big masks on, and start to like each other’s mask. The problem, of course, is that we can’t keep that up for long. One of the primary reasons early relationships fail, is the disparity between the person and the mask; we find out the person isn’t who we thought they were, and/or we get tired of trying to be someone we are not. It is a game of “Relationship Roulette” that we all play to some degree.

The only real way to avoid the “best foot forward” bullet is to first learn to be honest with yourself about who you are, and to accept and love who you are unconditionally. We all have faults and flaws; we are all beautifully imperfect. Often, the parts of us that we consider flaws are endearing to others. Our quirks and imperfections make us unique and intriguing. It is vital to a healthy relationship to build a foundation of honesty; if you’re a slob, don’t try to claim you are OCD clean; if you hate Opera, don’t claim to love it just because your date does. If you are in a foul mood and don’t feel like being around anyone, don’t lie and say you have a headache. Each little white lie we tell in the early stages

creates an illusion of someone we are not, and is something we have to remember to keep up throughout the relationship. Those lies alone can make maintaining a healthy relationship difficult and exhausting; extinguishing any chance of a future.

* * *

Let's look at our example again. Amanda and Chris meet at a rock-climbing gym they both become members of. The chemistry between them is immediate, and they plan to meet for dinner.

In scenario one, Chris talks about his work and his passion for what he does during dinner, but fails to mention his long hours. Amanda feigns interest in his business, but really doesn't understand; her interests lie more in the arts and personal relations. They laugh at jokes and stories, and both consider the first date a hit.

Over the course of the next five dates, they each continue to build themselves up to be the person they believe the other would be interested in.

Chris builds himself up to be a seasoned employee with a small staff of his own who delegates most of his work. He has claimed an interest in theater, though he has never been, and painted a picture of a wonderfully supportive family.

Amanda has manipulated her college major to seem to have more of a business direction than it does, and bites her tongue when Chris speaks disrespectfully of psychologists.

For the sixth date, Chris cooks dinner for Amanda at his house. He puts a lot of effort into cleaning (which is unusual for him) and painstakingly follows recipes to make a four-course meal for her. He had a long day at work and is exhausted, and he hates cooking, but told Amanda he enjoys it.

Amanda arrives with a bottle of wine, the first she has ever purchased. They enjoy a fabulous dinner, and then cuddle on the couch for a movie. Amanda ends up staying the night, and in her mind, the relationship suddenly becomes serious. She doesn't share how she feels, afraid it will scare him off. Chris loved having her over, but is exhausted and doesn't want to have to repeat the dinner.

Already, their lies are starting to cause negative feelings setting their relationship up for failure.

In scenario two, Amanda and Chris are more honest with each other. Amanda admits that she just doesn't get business, and that her

true passion is psychology. Chris shares his passion, admitting that the hours are long and explaining to Amanda why he loves what he does. They still laugh at jokes and stories, and both consider the date a hit, but in this scenario, they each have a greater appreciation and understanding of the other.

Over the course of the next few dates, they continue to get to know each other. Chris admits when he is exhausted from a long day at work and shares his struggles; Amanda laughs when he tells her he has never been to the theater and plans to take her some time. She shares her passion for learning how people work and where that passion came from, and Chris shares a few pieces of his less than perfect family dynamics, looking for her opinion.

For the sixth date, Chris invites Amanda to his place for dinner and admits he has no idea how to cook anything complicated. Amanda reveals that she loves to cook and offers to make dinner so he can relax after work. It is agreed that she will arrive early and cook for him in his kitchen. Chris spends some time cleaning, but admits when she arrives that he isn't the best housekeeper.

The evening ends the same; but in this scenario, Amanda and Chris don't have any negative feelings yet. Amanda feels that she would like the relationship to become serious, but feels relaxed and comfortable with the pace. Neither is hiding anything that causes feelings of tension or guilt, and there are no expectations that either is uncomfortable with. In this scenario, both Amanda and Chris are experiencing the growth of a healthy foundation; there is a feeling of relaxed contentment, because both are being honest about whom they are and have no untruths to try to maintain.

* * *

*Click on the picture
for more resources
about relationships.*



Chapter Two

Marriage

Marriage is the next logical step for two people who have bonded, are both looking for a long-term commitment, and believe the other is a good match for them. The word love comes into play long before marriage; but up until the day we say “I do”, love has little to do with holding a relationship together. At least – the real kind of love doesn’t; the mature kind, the kind of love that has nothing to do with butterflies in your stomach or excitement for the future. In truth, the English language is missing a word – something to fill in the space between lust/infatuation and love, because that missing word and the confusion between “it” (whatever it would be) and love, is the first bullet for marriage.

The natural emotional progression of a relationship, as most of us understand it, is this:

1. Attraction/lust
2. Infatuation
3. Love

The actual emotional progression of a relationship involves an emotion that gets confused with love and even gets labeled as love. It is an emotion that we accept as love, but is actually quite different. The reason for this confusion is our false concept of what Love is. Many couples choose to get married based on a false idea of what love is; they make a life-long decision based on an emotion that causes their bodies to produce hormones that make them feel good. They call that emotion love, and thereby believe that they must marry the person they “love”. But that feeling is really just infatuation mixed with knowledge gained about the other person over time, sometimes mixed with a touch of acceptance.

This emotion is what disappears when we say “the honeymoon period is over”. In relationships that are built on a strong, honest foundation, that emotion will fade and Love will become the primary force in the marriage. But in relationships that have weak foundations, the lack of that emotion causes discontent and irritation to erupt, and often, even Love is not enough to maintain all of the lies and deceit the relationship was built on.

So what, then, is Love you may ask? The best way to think of Love is to separate the feeling from the action. We often say “I love you” to

people we care about, and we also say “I love puppies”, “I love chocolate”, or “I love play on the beach”. The emotion of love is a feeling; it can be described as happy, giddy, safe, content, joyful, or a dozen other pronouns. We can “feel” love for people, pets, things, causes, or anything else that makes us happy.

Love as an action is what keeps people together. To Love someone means to actively care for them; to *do* for them in order to support them in being healthy and *feeling* loved. The feeling of love without action is useless to anyone but the person feeling it, but the feeling is usually what couples refer to when they say “I love you so much I want to marry you”. What is really meant is “you make me feel so good I want to keep you around me all the time”. But what happens when the good feeling is gone?

If a relationship is built on little white lies, the good feeling will fade quickly when the couple no longer has anywhere forward to go with the relationship – and marriage is as far as we can go. Many relationships change after marriage because the “chase” is over, the decision is made, and “real” life sets in. No more excitement, no more fear of losing your partner, no more need to wear the mask. The toilet seat gets left up, the toothpaste is a mess on the counter, no one wants to cook dinner, and neither partner is interested in watching *another* movie they aren’t in the mood for. Resentment and a feeling of being duped replace the good feeling, and the marriage is over.

If the marriage is built on trust and honesty, the good feeling will last longer because there are fewer surprises under the hood of the shiny new marriage. But the good feeling will eventually end anyway, and be replaced with the ho-hum lack of emotion that comes with living day-to-day life. The excitement wears off, and is replaced with a natural acceptance of the warm body living with you. This is the scenario that requires an understanding of both sides of love; the feeling and the doing.

We can dodge the bullet by understanding that, eventually, this love we feel will become work. The feeling will fade, and we will have to put effort into maintaining a healthy relationship. We need to understand that loving someone enough to marry them means we will continue to Love them (as an action) even when the feeling of love is replaced with boredom, irritation, aggravation, disappointment, and anger. The choice to Love someone “until death do us part” is a choice to not stop the action in the absence of the feeling. It is a choice that says “I

want you to feel loved even when I am angry with you". This choice is even more important when children are involved. Marrying someone with children is a multiple commitment; loving and cherishing the children is just as important as loving and cherishing the spouse.

We will visit Amanda and Chris again, and follow both scenarios from the previous chapter through to marriage.

* * *

In scenario one, both Amanda and Chris maintain much of the persona's they started with. Throughout their dating relationship, Chris continues to attempt to maintain the illusion that he is a neat person, but it is exhausting for him, and he has built a little resentment toward Amanda because of it. Amanda is close to finishing her degree, and is feeling distress regarding her career choice. She is hesitant to pursue her dream of becoming a psychologist because she feels Chris will not respect her decision, and is instead looking into business psycho-analytics; because of this, she is building resentment toward Chris. They are living together, still really enjoy being together, and share many interests, but their daily conversations are often dull or irritating. Chris vents about work, which Amanda doesn't understand, and Amanda loves to talk about theater, which Chris really has no interest in. Amanda expects Chris to be available more than his work schedule allows if he is going to get promoted, and Chris expects that Amanda will support his career because he believes she shares the same passion. In this simplified scenario, it is already easy to see how their relationship is strained. They still feel "in love", and have a desire to spend their lives together, but the foundation is already cracked.

When Chris proposes to Amanda, she says yes and they are both relieved. They both have the impression that their love must be strong enough for them to make it forever, and that marriage will "seal the deal".

After the wedding and honeymoon, they are happy for months. Chris is again happy to clean up after himself, and Amanda shows a real interest in his work. They are so filled with the *feeling* of love, that the actions come easy. But after a year, or two, they each start to slip and the masks start to fall away. Both of them are surprised by characteristics or feelings the other has that they never knew about. Communication becomes strained, and resentment builds. The good

feeling is gone, and they each start wondering what happened; they believe they no longer love the other, and that they are not loved.

The second scenario between Chris and Amanda is similar, but there is more support and encouragement. Still, after moving in together, they become somewhat bored. Amanda often wishes that Chris didn't work such long hours, and Chris isn't into the theater as much as Amanda and gets tired of her gushing about it. Amanda gets irritated at how messy Chris can be, and Chris gets irritated when he feels that Amanda is using him as a psychological test subject. The difference is that they aren't surprised, and they build less resentment.

When Chris proposes to Amanda and she says yes, they are both thrilled and excited for their futures. They feel that they know each other well and accept the other as they are.

After the wedding and honeymoon, they are again riding the emotional "high" of being in love, and their relationship grows even stronger. But after a few years, when Chris is working even longer hours, and Amanda is trying to build her career, the good feeling is gone and is replaced with boredom. The little resentments that have built start to feel overwhelming, and neither feels the love from the other they are used to. They lash out at each other because they feel hurt, and arguments start to become a regular thing. They both begin to wonder if it is over, if the other still loves them.

* * *

Most people believe that marriage will fix everything; we want to believe that marriage means our mate accepts us for who we really are and will Love us forever. The trap we fall into is one of self-deception; sometimes because we have been playing a role for so long that it no longer occurs to us that it is not honest, other times because we believe that marriage means we will always feel the emotion of love. Most often, it is a combination of both.

In both scenarios above, Chris and Amanda are in the same situation; and it is a situation that almost all marriages face sooner or later. It cannot be avoided, it is part of life, and it can be the bullet that destroys the relationship.

When the feeling is gone, what will we do? This is a question that should be answered before any thoughts of marriage. It is a personal question, and often difficult to answer, but necessary if there are hopes for a long and healthy marriage. We can break it down to make it a little easier to understand:

1. If I am angry with my partner, how will I react?
2. Do I value him/her enough to show affection even if I am hurt?
3. What will I do when I get bored?
4. Do I respect my partner enough to always be honest? Even if I am feeling disconnected from her/him?

The action of Love means you will treat your partner with respect, affection, good will, and empathy, no matter how you may be “feeling” at the time. It is a decision that must be made deliberately, and something you hold yourself to even when it is hard. The power of understanding Love as an action cannot be underestimated; it is what keeps people together through hard times. When a relationship is strained and we still feel *Loved*, we can hold onto hope for a better future, and we have the strength to work toward that future.

* * *

Either of our scenarios with Amanda and Chris could go either way. For arguments sake, let’s take the first scenario, and give both of them the deliberate knowledge of the action of Love.

As things get worse, and each of them continue to be surprised by the things the other has hidden, it becomes apparent that they are struggling. In an effort to show Amanda that he Loves her, Chris buys tickets to a play she wanted to see. In response to the positive feelings she gets from his gesture, Amanda plans a picnic in the park before the play. The show of love each of them received did two things: it reaffirmed their commitment to each other, and it energized the feeling of love that they thought they lost. The reappearance of the feeling allowed them to have an honest conversation; which is the first of many. Because they went into the marriage with the knowledge that it would be work, and that loving the other was a choice, they work through the deceptions and “clean up” the relationship. After hard work and a lot of hurt feelings, disappointment, and perseverance, they find a new understanding and respect for each other that sparks a new wave of the feeling of love.

For the second scenario, let's keep Amanda and Chris unaware of the differences between the feeling and actions of Love. As time wears on, both of them continue to feel less and less in love with the other. Their attempts to communicate are usually filled with accusations and hurt feelings. They cannot understand what changed, and why they no longer feel good about each other. Amanda tries to connect with Chris by taking him to a play – an action of good intentions, but directed toward making herself feel better, not showing Chris Love. He goes, but doesn't get any positive feelings from the experience. The discontentment goes on for years, because the relationship was once solid, and there are activities that they enjoy together. They get little bursts of good feelings, but ultimately the marriage will fail, because of the lack of understanding regarding feeling in love v/s actively loving someone. Both Chris and Amanda feel betrayed because their partner no longer provides them those good feelings, and because they believed that a loving marriage meant always feeling in love. Ultimately, they begin to search for that good feeling outside of the marriage, and their relationship dissolves until there are no good feelings left at all. Divorce is imminent.

* * *

Going into a marriage understanding what real Love is strengthens the foundations and allows us to enter the marriage without false notions of everything always being happy and joyful. It keeps us from being surprised when we have to put effort into caring for our partner, and gives us the groundwork to remind our partners how we deserve to be treated. It helps increase our commitment by decreasing our false perceptions. But even that knowledge doesn't protect us from many of the circumstances and actions that can cause a marriage to fail. Some of the more prevalent causes of divorce include:

1. Lack of Commitment – Understanding Love helps avoid this, but even understanding doesn't always protect us from the desire to just quit when things become difficult. Strong commitment is a must for any marriage; the shared commitments to fix the relationship instead of throw it away.
2. Unrealistic Expectations – Unfortunately, it is hard to know what to expect of something you have never experienced, so unrealistic expectations of marriage are very common. The best plan to avoid these expectations is to talk to couples who have been married for a long time or go to a marriage counselor before marriage. It is

- often the specifics that cause problems, the repetitive nature of a relationship, the loss of passion, unknown habits, etc. Understanding that the feeling will not always be there is a good step to not holding on to unrealistic expectations.
3. Getting Married too Young – Many marriages fail simply because the individuals were not yet mature enough to settle down. Youth is full of exuberance and experimentation; we gain the wisdom we need to make a marriage successful through trial and error when we are young. Getting married before we have experienced enough of adult life gives us unrealistic expectations and builds resentment for our lost youth.
 4. Arguing – Arguments will happen in every relationship, they can even be healthy. But arguments that have no resolution lead to divorce; yelling at each other, placing blame and accusations, and expressing anger without taking the time to find a compromising resolution just leads to anger resentment, and more tension. Arguments should be seen as an opportunity to communicate disagreements and find resolution, never as a way to vent pent up emotions at your partner.
 5. Infidelity – The desire to be with another person is part of human nature. Being monogamous will likely be an effort at some point, and the temptation toward infidelity is often a reaction to boredom and/or discontent. It is one of the hardest subjects for couples to talk about, but open discussions about the desire to be with another person can improve a marriage. If we share our desire to have a missing need filled by another person, it gives our partner the opportunity to fill those needs; chances are it will be a surprise that someone is unfulfilled.
 6. Inequality – The give and take of a marriage must be equal. If one partner feels the need to “carry” the other, with no reciprocation, the marriage will likely fail due to resentment and feelings of being used.
 7. Abuse – Too many marriages fail due to abuse. Abuse – physical, emotional, or psychological – is unacceptable. Many men and women find themselves in marriages that they feel trapped in because of abuse. If you are being abused, do not hesitate – go to the nearest shelter and get help. There are organizations all over the country designed to protect victims of abuse and help them start over.

Marriage is a decision that will change your life forever, whether it succeeds or fails. Within a marriage there must be communication, respect, trust, commitment, loyalty, and affection. We play Relationship Roulette in marriage in many ways; by lying, cheating, not communicating properly, or by expecting too much. Every marriage has a lot of bullets to dodge, but understanding what Love means and standing firm in your commitment will help you keep your marriage alive and healthy.

Chapter Three

Divorce

Divorce is a prevalent force in our society. We have the freedom to choose it at any given time in our marriage. Many times, divorce is chosen as an option to get away from the difficulty of making a marriage work; however, many couples who choose to push through periods when they would *like* to divorce their spouse discover that the marriage gets stronger.

But what if you're not one of those couples? If, by chance, you didn't have the fight in you, or are leaving a marriage that is dangerous or unhealthy for you, or you are the one being left?

Divorce is rocky ground. We have all heard the stories of divorces that are filled with anger and animosity; couples who used to love each other fighting in court for the kids or the house or the money. Divorce can destroy us, or make us stronger. Unfortunately, neither partner has complete control over how the divorce will go, and there are some factors that can make the process complicated:

- Children
- Assets, both physical and monetary
- Fees
- Emotions

Divorce involving children is dangerous ground and should, if at all possible, be navigated with the help of a family therapist or spiritual counselor. Young children do not experience the disintegration of a marriage the same way the parents do. Even if kids are regularly exposed to arguing, fighting, and sometimes-even abuse, they continue to have hope. Even in situations where a parent chooses divorce for the good of the kids, they will be traumatized by the loss of the family as a whole. This makes any divorce with children involved a very delicate situation, and – as parents – it is the adults job to gauge what is best for their kids and work toward that goal, always remembering that the children love and need each parent, and are being forced into an uncomfortable and devastating situation they had no say in.

Money in divorce is the secondary main fighting point and the first when kids are not involved. Many decisions are best made outside of the courtroom, like who gets the house, how will the savings account be

divided, how are the personal belongings divided. There are many states that rule divorce at 50%-50%, meaning everything is divided equally. This judgment often causes couples to sell their home in order to split the profit, or for the savings and investment accounts to be split equally, even if one spouse had been contributing longer than the marriage. It is safest for both parties to speak rationally and empathetically with the other to come to mutual agreements regarding all aspects of the marital assets.

Attorney fees can be astronomical for divorce, and the more the couples argue, the more the attorneys will make. This is, again, why entering into a divorce with as much compassion for the other as possible, will be best for each party.

Which leaves us with the primary bullet for divorce – Emotions. Once we have made it to the divorce stage, we are already emotionally drained and aggravated equally. We may feel betrayed, hurt, angry, and disappointed. We are likely grieving for the loss of the marriage and all of the dreams it represented for us, as well as feelings of rejection for the loss of the love we believed we had. Rarely do marriages end because two people just stop loving each other; there is usually a catalyst that pushes one or both to a breaking point, and built up damage that makes us feel that there is no other way out. In many ways, we get trapped into the divorce decision. The emotions that tornado around us when we divorce are the primary reason that divorces become so vicious. It is the desire to hurt back, the fear of losing more, and the grief of losing the marriage. There are some important steps to consider as soon as divorce is mentioned, even before a conversation occurs.

1. Have I done everything I can to keep my marriage alive, and is there anything else I can do to save it?
 - This is an important question whether you are the one requesting the divorce, or whether your spouse has requested it. We enter into marriage believing it is forever, and rarely do we stop loving someone enough to really want that to end. So looking back at the marriage and analyzing your efforts can sometimes lead to a change of heart; an understanding that there is more that can be done.
2. How do I really *feel* about my spouse?

- It is necessary to look past the anger and hurt to realize how you actually feel *about* your spouse. Try to reconnect with how you felt about him/her at the beginning of the marriage. It's important for us to acknowledge, honestly, how we feel. "I hate him!" is easily broken down into "I love *him*, but I hate the way he makes me feel like I don't matter". Even if the behaviors that cause the divorce will never change, the attitude you use when interacting can come from a more honest and logical emotion. This exercise will help you find empathy, and give you a way to decrease the negative feelings as much as possible when actually dealing with your spouse.
3. What is my primary emotion about the divorce?
- Acknowledging how you feel about the divorce can give you clarity. You may feel relief, loss, anger, disappointment, failure, or a mixture of many emotions. Once you understand how you feel, you can break down the emotion and find a way to cope with it, thereby controlling it. If you have followed two steps above, you will already know if there is more you can do to save the marriage, and how you feel about your spouse; these three emotions combined leave us with just a few options.
 - a. I've done everything I can, I love my spouse, and I'm upset it's over.
 - b. I've done everything I can, I dislike my spouse, and I'm relieved it's over.
 - c. I could do more, I love my spouse, and I'm upset it's over.
 - d. I could do more, I dislike my spouse, and I'm relieved it over.
1. How do I want to handle speaking to my spouse?
- Words can either hurt or heal. Negative interactions breed hostility, anger, and revenge. No matter what position you are in, finding a way to deal with your spouse respectfully and honestly is paramount. The above exercises should have brought you to an emotional conclusion. In most divorces, the bitterness that arises comes from hurt and

sadness, which emerges as anger. If the marriage is really over and there is nothing you can do to change that, it is in your best interest to behave logically and respectfully. Anger is a cover emotion; it is what we use to protect ourselves from being vulnerable and hurt, and it is the emotion that gets us into the most trouble. Use the tools above to find the emotion below the anger, and work from that emotion instead. The outcome will be more positive; and even if the outcome is primarily controlled by your spouses' angry behavior, you won't make it worse and can feel satisfaction in handling yourself with decorum.

2. Where do I want us to be in two years?
 - Do you still enjoy some things with your spouse? Do you hope to be friends or to never have to see them again? Are there children involved and what would be best for them? Do you have mutual friends? Do you want to live in the same area? Picturing a future helps us cope with the present. And deciding what kind of relationship you want to have with your spouse after the dust settles will help you begin to move on.
3. What is the best approach to my situation?
 - If you and your spouse cannot be in the same room without screaming at each other, it may be best to have lawyers do all the work. If there are children involved, it is best to learn to deal with each other kindly. Each situation is different, and the choice needs to be made based on your individual case. One thing stands true for all situations though – a deliberate decision on how to deal with your spouse and the situation will give you control of its direction.

So what about after the divorce? How do we figure out how to function again? Divorce is one of the most stressful life changes people go through. It is important to remember that you will be emotional, confused, and off-balance for a while. Many men and women are tempted to immediately jump back into the dating pool; the reason this is so prevalent is the feeling of being alone. Marriage provides us with a constant companion. Even if our spouse wasn't home much, the knowledge that he/she is out there and will eventually be home keeps us from feeling alone. The desire to fill that void immediately can be

very strong. The danger is that we are emotionally vulnerable, and almost any new relationship can leave us feeling like we are in love. We love the attention, the newness, the excitement, the distraction; we often end up becoming very attached for a short period of time. These relationships are often called “rebound” relationships. A rebound fling can be healthy or disastrous; they serve to distract us from our despair and push us back into the dating world; but they are dangerous as well, usually for the person we are dating. The emotional distress of a newly divorced individual is appealing to many; we appear vulnerable and very receptive to any show of kindness. This temporary vulnerability makes us like people we normally wouldn’t be attracted to, and the relationships are usually short lived. Often, they serve the purpose of a stepping-stone toward something more substantial or contribute to worsen our emotional state.

It is healthiest to remain single and abstinent after divorce, until the feelings of need dissipate. When you feel comfortable with your new status and your own company, it is then safe to start dating again. Though it will be a very different dating world than you are accustomed to!

Dating after a divorcee isn’t much different than pre-marriage dating, unless there are children involved. Many single parents prefer to date other single parents, simply because there is a mutual understanding of time constraints, protectiveness of the children, and the hardships of single parenting. There are a lot of organizations that cater to single parents and provide social events.

For many divorcees, the consideration that they have been married before is not an issue for the people they date or for the future. It is important to remember though, that there may be issues that can arise. If there are children involved, there are always considerations regarding how involved you want to allow your date to be with the kids, their style of parenting if it becomes serious, and – of course – how will he/she deal with your ex-spouse. If you are still friends with your ex-spouse, how will your date handle that; will he/she feel jealousy or be supportive.

The biggest problem that divorcees have when they start dating again is the inability to separate their ex-spouse from their date. People carry baggage – everything your ex-spouse did to hurt you or upset you is a memory that is naturally implanted onto every possible date you meet. Our biggest mistake is making new partners suffer for our old

partners mistakes. This can be a difficult bullet to dodge, but it's possible with constant reminders to yourself that every person is different and deserves the opportunity to show you who they are without being pre-labeled. And always remember, what we do to others we do the same to ourselves.

* * *

Let's look at two short scenarios for Amanda and Chris. In both, they have mutually agreed that they no longer want to be married. Both have had one affair, they argue a lot without resolution, Chris feels unappreciated, Amanda feels ignored, and they irritate each other.

In scenario one, Chris and Amanda are angry. They feel rejected by the other, and feel bitterness and guilt regarding the affairs. They have been living in the home Chris owned before they married, but Amanda wants to get back at Chris, and is fighting to take half of the home's value. Because of Amanda's push to get the house, Chris is fighting for half of the investments that Amanda started before they were married and has controlled throughout the marriage. Chris believes that, since the investments were meant for their retirement and his income allowed her to invest more, he should have half; and Amanda believes that, since she helped pay for the house while she was there, she should have half. Both have valid points, and the state they live in will likely split everything in half anyway, but Chris and Amanda don't agree. He wants to keep the house, she wants to keep the investment, and they are fighting about furniture. They hire lawyers because they cannot come to an agreement. By the end of the divorce, they have sold the house, cashed out the investments, and spent 30% of the total in lawyers' fees. They both feel jilted, and they are angry and bitter at each other. They exchange hurtful words every time they see each other, and find living in the same town uncomfortable. Months later, their mutual friends no longer feel comfortable and feel they have to be careful around each of them, most were forced to choose either Chris or Amanda, and a few just stopped talking to both of them.

In scenario two, Amanda is very angry with Chris, and Chris is angry with Amanda, but attempts to work through the anger in order to remain rational. When Amanda says she wants the house, Chris is calm enough to agree to sell the house and split the profit if she will agree to cash out the investments and split those. Because Chris didn't immediately lash back with a way to hurt Amanda back, she had the

opportunity to think about it. She decided that the investments were worth more than half the house and declined. Chris put together a list of the things they owned that were important to him and that he would like to keep and gave it to Amanda, asking her if there were things on that list that she wanted to keep as well. Throughout the divorce, Chris was able to be logical and rational. He was hurt and disappointed, but realized there was no way to save the marriage, and his best course of action was to compromise as much as possible. In the end, they only had to hire one lawyer to write up and file the paperwork, and they both walked away from the marriage fairly satisfied with what they took with them. After a few months, Amanda's anger faded, and she and Chris occasionally get together for dinner. Their conversations are cordial, their mutual friends are still mutual, and they are able to move on with few negative emotions.

* * *



For more relationship resources, click on the picture.

The outcome of a divorce can be greatly altered by a compromising attitude. When couples fight about everything, they both lose; but often, just one rational voice can make the whole process a little smoother.

Chapter Four

Re-Marriage

So, you have survived divorce and met someone else. The idea of getting married again can be a terrifying one. Many people hesitate to “jump into the fire” again; for fear that the failure of the past marriage will be repeated. There are many considerations that should be well contemplated before getting re-married. The biggest, of course, is the blended family if children are involved. Matters of parenting style and respect for the other parent should be discussed, as well as living arrangements, schooling, and how involved the new spouse will be in raising the kids. Often, re-marriage creates a blended family with children of both spouses.

When no children are involved, the only real difference between a first and second or third marriage is baggage and wisdom. Take the time to learn from the mistakes you made in the failed marriage, so you can attempt to not make them again. Work on the damage you carry with you openly with your new partner, so he/she understands what fears you have and what triggers there may be for making you feel frightened or upset.

Really, the biggest bullet to dodge is the transferring of our past onto our present. It is easy to do, and happens in very subtle but dangerous ways; the worst of which is the tendency to expect our new spouse to behave in the same basic ways as our ex-spouse. Once the marriage documents are signed, we subconsciously expect that the same things are going to happen; if our ex-spouse cheated, we will worry when our new spouse has to work late; if we were accustomed to our ex-spouse not respecting our ideas, we will hesitate to share them with our new one; if there was a history of abuse, we will live in fear of it starting again. These pieces of emotional baggage are difficult to get rid of, and should be discussed with our new partners.

If open discussions regarding each partners past damage is not done, the possibility for dangerous games to be played increases. Many second marriages are susceptible to “testing”. Our human nature pushes us to protect ourselves from things we know can hurt us, and in many cases, we do that by testing our partners; trying to see if we can push

them into doing that thing we are afraid of. If we fail, we feel safer. Unfortunately, we usually succeed in manipulating our partner into becoming exactly what we fear.

* * *

We can clarify this by looking at the previous example of Amanda and Chris. In their marriage, Amanda felt that Chris didn't listen to her; he insulted her ideas regarding finances, refused to talk to her about her desire to buy a new house, and regularly seemed distant when he came home from work. She tried many methods to get him to pay attention to her, but nothing worked for very long. Eventually, she stopped trying, and Chris continued focusing on things other than her. At that point, she felt unloved and rejected, and asked for a divorce.

In her new relationship, her partner Eric has consistently been very attentive. He buys her flowers and asks about her day, and he listens when she talks about her passions. Shortly after they get married, Eric goes through some changes at work that require a lot of his attention. He has to work late, and is tired and distracted when he gets home.

Amanda's first fear is that he is having an affair, and she mentions her concern to him. Eric laughs and explains the situation, which makes Amanda less concerned about the affair, but still feeling ignored. Because of her fear of repeating the failed attempts to get Chris' attention in her first marriage, Amanda does not talk to Eric about how she feels. She had spoken to him about it before, and believes that he should understand what she is going through. She starts disconnecting, both in an attempt to separate herself, and in hopes that Eric will notice and show concern.

Since Eric isn't a mind reader, and is distracted by his career, he reads Amanda's distance as apathy and begins to stay at the office longer. Their marriage is in danger.

* * *

It is always important to have open and honest communication in any marriage, but it is even more important in a second marriage, and the honesty needs to start with ourselves. We have to look at our behaviors and feelings introspectively and understand why we do what we do. Is our behavior directed at our current spouses' actions, or our exes? Are we acting out of fear? And how can we manage our fear without jeopardizing the relationship?

The next bullet for a second marriage is stubbornness. In our previous marriage, we built a specific way of life; we created a schedule and habits that become ingrained in our subconscious, and we attempt to recreate those habits and schedules with our new partners.

We may not do this intentionally; it is easy to see that the current spouse and the ex are very different individuals, with different likes and dislikes, and different habits. But we still tend to try to repeat our pasts; if we are still attached to that past, the tendency will be stronger.

* * *

Again, we can illustrate this with an example of Chris.

In his marriage with Amanda, Chris had few home responsibilities. Amanda usually made dinner, cleaned most of the time, and did his laundry. While he was single, of course, Chris became proficient again at taking care of himself, but after he married Sophia, he began to slip into his old habits. He subconsciously expected that Sophia would enjoy cooking dinner because Amanda did, and that she would do most of the cleaning and take care of the laundry. He also enjoyed spending an hour watching television in bed every night before sleep and 'snoozed' the alarm clock three times before getting up.

Sophia hates cooking, and is just as bad at housecleaning as Chris. They begin feeling discord as soon as they get home because Sophia feels like she is expected to play housewife even though she works just as hard as Chris, and Chris feels like Sophia must not care for him because she doesn't take care of him the way he is accustomed to.

They begin fighting most mornings because Sophia hates Chris' snoozing habits – but the feelings causing the arguing are more about their disharmony regarding household chores.

There is really no way for us to change our subconscious desires in regards to how our daily lives work. But we can approach the changes deliberately by remembering that a new marriage is an adjustment for everyone involved, and then make a conscious decision to change the habits that may be impeding the progress of our new marriage.

Chapter 5

....What Now??

Whether you are single, married, divorced, or in a second marriage, you are likely wondering what your next step should be. This book can be a starting point that can lead you toward taking active participation in the direction of your life.

If you are single, you may be wondering how to meet a partner who you are attracted to and can fulfill your life, while also being that someone to build a happy future with.

If you are married, you may be trying to figure out how to maintain the happy marriage you have, or how to save a marriage that has lost its' luster.

If you are considering divorce, you are likely trying to figure out the best way to broche the subject, if it really is what you want, and you are struggling with the emotions of loss and rejection. If divorce has been brought up to you, chances are you are struggling trying to figure out how to stop it from happening.

If you are considering re-marriage, or already re-married, you may be feeling fear and insecurity. You may be feeling unsure of "trying again", or worried that your new marriage will fail as well and wondering how to secure it.

Or, you are already in a lasting relationship and wondering "what comes next?".

No matter what phase of life you are in, there is one characterization that needs to be focused on, and it has nothing to do with another person.

Each stage of life and relationship requires a great deal of self-exploration and understanding. The first step of achieving your goals is first knowing what those goals are. The first step of building a lasting relationship is understanding the sacrifices you will personally need to make and assuring yourself that you are willing to make those sacrifices.

What all that means, is that the next step you need to take, no matter what your situation is, is to decide what you want. Some questions that will help you get started are:

1. What area of your life are you most unhappy with?

2. What is your greatest desire for your life right now and for the future?
3. What would you like to avoid more than anything else?
4. What are your priorities? Family, money, good-will, fun?

Once you know what you want, it's important to figure out if it is realistic and legitimate. Many of our hopes and dreams need to be broken down into steps to achieve them, including those for our relationships. It is unrealistic for a 17 year old high school dropout who is living on her friends couch to make marrying a millionaire account executive her first goal. In order to reach that goal, she needs to accept the fact that she needs to make herself desirable to a millionaire account executive by increasing her life status and education. We also often create goals for ourselves based on what others or, society, want for us. These goals are often not honest; society says women should be very thin and wear a lot of makeup to be beautiful, but making that a goal is both dishonest and unrealistic for most women. While a lot of women want to be "beautiful", very few want to be stick-skinny, unhealthy, hungry, and coated in layers of heavy makeup. Our goals must always be based on our perceptions while disregarding the perceptions of society and – sometimes – family. To lead a happy and successful life, you must "dare yourself to be different" while learning to cherish that difference. Some questions you should ask yourself to help guide the process are:

1. Do I have all the tools I need to achieve my goal?
2. Is my goal realistic and doable right now?
3. If my goal were handed to me, would I be able to keep it "alive".
4. Is my goal what I want, or what those around me want for me?
5. Will my goal aid in my future health and happiness, and overall well-being?

Once we know what our primary goals are, and if they are honest and realistic, we can break them down into an array of short-term goals. Short-term goals are easier for us to handle – they allow us to track our progress and get feelings of achievement throughout the process.

If your goal is to find a partner, break down that process into smaller goals.

- Maybe you need to choose some areas of interest and find local activity groups surrounding those interests.

- Maybe you need to work toward getting a vehicle so you can spend less time on public transportation and have a way to get to your dates.
- Maybe you need to alter your work schedule so you have time to meet people.

If your goal is to save your marriage, locate the areas of the marriage that are failing, and create goals to strengthen those areas.

- If communication is an issue, make a goal to have regular, heartfelt conversations.
- If trust is an issue, make small goals that will help increase the trust factor; maybe to set up the ability to work from home, to have an open conversation once per week, or setting aside some time each week for “honest time”, where you can each ask any questions and are both required to answer honestly.
- If the issue is personal boredom, set up goals that include your spouse and interests you both have. Maybe try a new activity, or a project around the house. The problem with boredom is that it often leads to infidelity; set a goal to find something to appreciate about your spouse every day, write them down. And by all means share them.

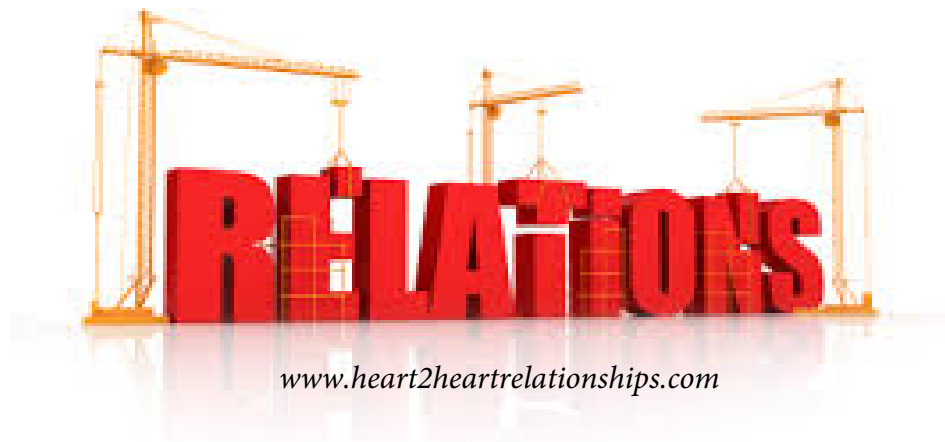
Often times, our desire to have a relationship over-rides our need to be ready for one. Healthy relationships can only happen if the individuals in them are healthy. It is quite possible that what you need to do now to achieve your relationship goals has nothing to do with another person, and everything to do with working toward appreciating, accepting, and loving yourself.

The most dangerous games we play in life are with ourselves, and if we don't play deliberately and honestly, we often lose. We lie to ourselves, over or under-rate our abilities and achievements, and – most harmfully – convince ourselves that having a partner will make us happier people. But happy has to come from inside; you cannot expect another person to be happy around you if you cannot enjoy your own company.

What we do now – in this moment – is what defines who we are and if we will succeed or fail. The choices we make, the goals we set, the deliberation of our own lives, are all we can ever really count on,

because if we fall apart, chances are that everything around us will fall apart too.

So. Now what??? Pick up a piece of paper and pen, and start living your life deliberately. Reread this book over and over and over again, then choose your direction, pick a path, decide what you need, and start moving toward your destiny.



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