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Truths

TO TRANSFORM
YOUR MARRIAGE

forBetter[®]

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trans form

/tran(t)s' form/

to make a thorough or dramatic change in the form, appearance, or character of: *the couple was committed to transform their marriage*

How do you complete a 1,000 mile journey?

One step at a time. It works the same way in taking your marriage from where it is — to where you want it to be. One step at a time! We call such incremental progress 'small wins'.

The experts agree, small wins are vital to success when it comes to change behavior (i.e. transformation). A large body of research has shown that small wins have a lot of power and great influence. Small wins convince people that larger accomplishments are achievable.

Small wins get couples moving forward. Small wins give hope. Small wins build momentum. Small wins create confidence. An accumulation of small wins can totally transform the trajectory of your marriage over time.



1

Happy marriages are based on deep friendship.

A “marital friendship” is made up of two partners who 1) know, 2) like, and 3) have each others’ back.

These couples are well versed in each other’s likes, dislikes, personality quirks, hopes, and dreams. They express their fondness in big and small ways — day in and day out. They have a mutual respect for and enjoyment of each others’ company.

Couples who keep their friendship strong despite the inevitable disagreements and irritations of married life, experience what is known as “positive sentiment override.”

This is where positive thoughts about each other and the marriage are so permeating that they tend to override their negative feelings and offers the best protection against feeling adversarial toward their spouse.

Friendship fuels the flames of romance because it offers the best protection against feeling adversarial toward your spouse.



2

EQ is essential to relationship success.

Emotional intelligence is all about awareness. Someone with high EQ has the ability to recognize, understand and *respond appropriately* to emotions — both yours and your partners.

SCENARIO: A couple decides earlier in the day to leave at 7:00 o'clock for the movies. Just before 7:00 he announces, "I'll be in the car." She's running late and begins to feel the stress. It's now 7:10, he's frustrated, and heads back inside. How will he respond?

LOW EQ response: "What the hell is taking so long."

HIGH EQ response: "Babe, what can I help you with."

The more emotionally intelligent a couple — the better able they are to understand, honor, and respect each other and their marriage. Here's the really great news — EQ is a skill anyone can learn.



3

The purpose of marriage is to bring out the best in your partner.

You remember your vows ... to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better or for worse, until death parts us. In these words is not just the promise to be faithful and true, to stay married, but to also commit to bringing out the best in each other.

In the strongest of marriages, spouses share a deep sense of meaning. They don't just get along — they also support each other's hopes and aspirations and build a sense of purpose into their lives together. They're not focused on changing their partner, but rather understanding, accepting, and supporting them.

4

The early years of marriage are the most dangerous.

There's a marriage crisis in developed countries around the globe. Here's what the fallout looks like in the United States.

- Half of all who divorce do so within 7 years
- The peak rate of divorce is in year 4
- 70% of these couples divorce without seeking professional counseling

Here's the tragic part? The vast majority of these couples could be happily married today if they had only been better equipped for the realities of marriage.

The challenges, frustrations, disappointments you're struggling with right now are common to all marriages. Your experience is 'normal'. Divorce, and eventual re-marriage, only swaps your current set of relationship challenges with another.

Don't panic. Don't bail in the midst of your temporary discontent. Get some coaching. Develop your skills. Put them into practice. You can learn how to thrive right where you are.



5

Why most marriage therapy fails:

Conflict is common to all marriages. Perhaps the biggest myth of all is that communication, and more specifically — learning to resolve your conflicts — is the be-all-end-all to an enduring and happy marriage.

Over the past 50 years, the most common practice for resolving conflict is called “active listening.” Active listening requires that the listener fully concentrates, understands, responds, and then remembers what is being said. It’s supposed to be a two-way conversation without anger. The intent is for couples to open up, avoid misunderstandings, resolve conflict, and build trust.

The problem is, active listening just doesn’t work very well. This is because it asks couples to perform Olympic-level emotional gymnastics when their relationship can barely walk.

A wide range of marital therapies based on conflict resolution share a very high relapse rate. A year post therapy, only 18 percent of couples see a meaningful improvement and retain those benefits.



6

Connection trumps compatibility.

Counselors and therapists get this all the time, “Maybe I married the wrong person ... we just aren’t that compatible.” Know this — compatibility is overrated.

Truth is, all couples, regardless of how compatible they are, still experience conflict. What you want is connection.

Connection isn’t about common interests. Connection comes from a deep personal friendship.

7

The key to greater connection — turning toward.

Real-life romance is kept alive each time you let your spouse know he or she is valued during the grind of everyday life.

In marriage, couples are making ‘bids’ daily for each other’s connection, affection, humor, or support. The partner responds to each bid either by *turning toward* the spouse or *turning away*.

Turning toward creates a positive engagement. One small gesture can lead to another, and then another.

EXAMPLE: Couple running errands — husband cranks up the radio.

WIFE: “Wow, does this ever bring back memories.”

HUSBAND: Do you remember where we were when we first heard this song?”

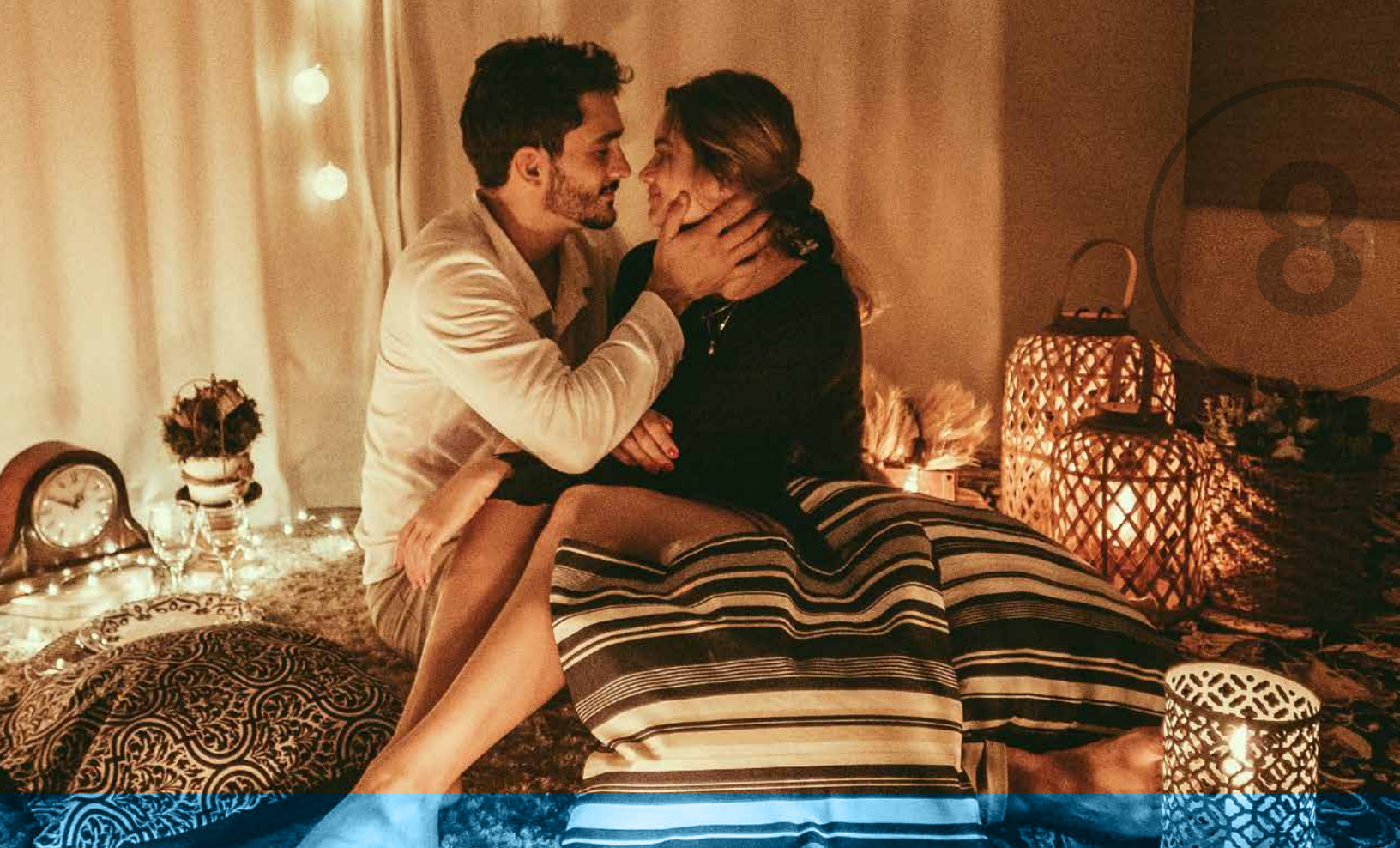
WIFE: “Of course — at the Red Pepper ordering tacos.”

HUSBAND: “I can still see you in your checkered tank top and faded Levi’s.”

WIFE: “Of all the compliments you could have given me that day, you told me I looked fetching.”

HUSBAND: “Fifteen years later you still are, Babe.”

Making it a habit to turn toward your partner in all the mini-moments of life is the basis of friendship, trust, emotional connection, passion, and a satisfying sex life.



8

*Sex is only one piece
of the intimacy puzzle.*

While sex is absolutely a piece of the intimacy puzzle, it's only one piece. True intimacy touches all 5 areas of your being - physical (non-sexual), intellectual, emotional, spiritual AND sexual.

Vulnerability is what activates intimacy. Allowing your partner in, to really see you, know you, hear you - the good, the bad, the beautiful and the ugly — that's where real intimacy is found.

By learning to expand your understanding to include all five facets of intimacy, you'll expand your ability to feel more closely connected to your partner.



9

The primary cause of conflict — couples see things differently.

Think about it. You and your spouse are VERY different. Different DNA. Different family dynamics. Different educations. Different life experiences. Different personalities, passions, beliefs, convictions. This is true no matter who you marry.

It's the differences between you and your spouse that cause tension and recurring conflict. Possibilities could include:

PERSONALITY: One of you is an introvert who prefers a quiet Friday night at home after a tough work week. The other partner is an extrovert who wants go out and paint the town.

MONEY: One of you is a seasoned saver. The other a spender with advanced skills.

SEX: You and your partner are amazing together — but your appetites differ. One of you is fully satisfied with once a week. The other partner is craving more.

COMMUNICATION STYLE: One of you prefers the story headline. The other spouse relishes to share the chapter details.

These types of differences are the common causes of conflict. Differences you don't 'resolve' — but rather — differences you must learn to 'manage'.



10

Your conflict will come in two varieties — ‘solvable’ and ‘perpetual.’

Dr. Gottman’s research makes clear all conflict is NOT created equally. In fact, marital conflict falls into two primary categories — solvable and perpetual.

As you know, in the world of business, there are ‘problems to solve’ and ‘tensions to manage’. For example, if traffic is causing your company’s server to keep crashing, you solve that by increasing the server capacity. In contrast, you don’t solve tension between personalities in your sales and marketing departments, you must manage those tensions. It works the same way in your marriage.

In fact, Dr. Gottman’s scientific data concludes the minority of marital conflicts are ‘problems to solve’ (i.e. solvable) while the majority of marital conflicts are ‘tensions to manage’ (i.e. perpetual).

Every marriage that thrives understands the critical difference between the two types of conflict.



11

There is no absolute reality in marital conflict — only two equally legitimate alternative realities.

Many of your differences are really NOT matters of “fact.” We are all complicated creatures whose actions and reactions are governed by a wide array of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and memories.

In other words, reality is subjective. For example, which are more beautiful, brown eyes or blue eyes? Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The point being, you and your spouse may have different perspectives without either of you being right or wrong.

You’ll face countless ‘alternative realities’ — both big and small — throughout your marriage. One of you wants a condo downtown, the other a house in the burbs. One of you wants to start a family, the other wants to wait.

In marriages that thrive, partners learn to understand and respect their partners perspective — even when they disagree with it.

Dr. John Gottman is this country's foremost relationship expert. For 40 years he's leveraged his MIT degree in math and his Ph.D. in psychology to compile the most rigorous scientific data about why some marriages succeed and others fail.

From the study of more than 3,000 couples, Dr. Gottman was able to predict with 91% accuracy which marriages would eventually fail or succeed. It's important to note, his predictions weren't based on preconceived notions, intuition, opinion, or collective points of view — but on hard scientific evidence.

Here are the **The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse** (the four most toxic behaviors of marriage):

CRITICISM: When negative words are used to attack a partner's personality or character.

CONTEMPT: Sarcasm and cynicism are types of contempt. So are name-calling, eye-rolling, sneering, mockery, and hostile humor. Contempt is highly toxic to a relationship because it conveys disgust. Contempt is fueled by long-simmering negative thoughts about the partner.

DEFENSIVENESS: When defending yourself, you're saying in effect, "The problem isn't me, it's you." Because defensiveness is really a way of blaming your partner, it only serves to escalate the conflict.

STONEWALLING: When a conflict escalates sufficiently, one partner eventually tunes out. They might get up and leave the room or completely disengage. The stonewaller acts as though he couldn't care less about what's being said.

Of these four toxins, contempt is the #1 most poisonous to your relationship.



13

It's healthy to 'complain' — toxic to 'criticize' — and vital to know the difference.

A complaint focuses on a specific behavior.

COMPLAINT: "I was disappointed at dinner when you interrupted my response to Jack's question. He was asking me about my new promotion. It was my story to tell. In the future, please give me the courtesy to share personal news like that myself. Okay?"

In contrast, a criticism is a personal verbal attack on your partner's character or personality.

CRITICISM: "I was disappointed at dinner when you interrupted my response to Jack's question. What's wrong with you? You are clueless in social settings!"



14

Healthy couples are good at making repairs.

Every couple argues. Every healthy couple knows how to repair during an argument.

A 'repair attempt' can be any kind of comment or action — silly or otherwise — that prevents negativity from escalating out of control. A good repair lightens the mood and keeps the conversation productive.

The next time you're responsible for escalating a conversation, you might offer a repair like "That was snarky of me, I'm sorry. Let me start over." The success or failure of a couple's repair attempts is one of the primary factors in whether your marriage flourishes or flounders.



15

Empathy is the ability to disagree without being disagreeable.

Technically, empathy is the ability to understand another person's point of view. But it's more than that. It's the ability to feel what they're feeling. To believe that their experience is valuable. Important. Maybe even more valuable and more important than your own.

With empathy, you can validate your partner's point of view, even if you don't agree with it.

It's the ability to disagree without being disagreeable. It's experiencing conflict with your partner, yet still feeling close, connected and validated. It's a skill that can be learned. It's the key to a more intimate connection with your spouse.



16

16

Your current thoughts forecasts your future outcome.

Your mindset determines how you perceive, think, decide, and act. Your mindset is profoundly influential over the outcome of your marriage.

Happily married couples aren't smarter, richer, or more psychologically astute than others. But in their day-to-day lives, they have hit upon a dynamic that keeps their negative thoughts and feeling about each other — which all couples have — from overwhelming their positive ones.

Having a fundamentally positive view of your spouse and your marriage is a powerful buffer when — not if — hard times come.



17

Take personal 'response-ability.'

Blame, in and of itself, doesn't get you unstuck. Blame is not fuel to get your marriage moving forward. On the contrary. What DOES create motion in a partnership is when a couple can both see their own role in the struggle, and begin to own it.

You have the ability to choose how you think, speak, and act in any situation, to any circumstance. In your marriage, you're going to experience all kinds of twists and turns. Challenges. Frustrations. Unmet expectations. Disappointments. Storms. While you don't have control over your partner's thoughts, words, actions, or emotions – you do have control over yours.

To accept this reality is to take personal response-ability.

A winning strategy is more of 'we'.

One of the basic tasks of a marriage is to establish a sense of 'team'.

You made that promise on your wedding day — that you'd be 'partners' in this life together. This means cooperation between the two of you, not competition. It's about a house united — not divided. It's about solidarity. It's about you and your mate — united together — against the world!

When you and your spouse see things differently — say on matters of money — talk it over. Don't be a bully, pushing for your own way. That's not 'team'. Rather, express your concerns, needs, fantasies and fears. Seek to understand your partner. Give and accept influence. Negotiate. Compromise. Make a habit of team and winning together.



19

Rituals are foundational to a connected couple.

Rituals are simply formalized routines that you follow to make your time together with your spouse more sacred. More special. More connected.

You might have formal rituals around your anniversary, birthdays, or holidays. And you might have dozens of informal rituals. Two really simple, but critical, rituals of connection are how you start and end your days together.

Be purposeful in establishing rituals that create real emotional and intellectual intimacy. What might you do in your morning rituals together? Wake? Morning devotional? Workout? Shower? Tag team the kids? Breakfast? Commute?

What do you do before going your different ways for the day? Share a hug? A meaningful kiss? A prayer?

Whatever you do — do it on purpose. Rituals should be created consistently enough and intentionally enough, that when you miss them ... you really miss them.



20

Avoid “relationship atrophy” by deciding to move.

It’s happened to you, or someone you know. You break a bone in your arm or leg. It requires a cast to immobilize the limb. Then 6-8 weeks later, when the cast comes off, your limb is seriously weakened, reduced, atrophied — just because it was stuck — immobilized in that cast.

The same thing happens to a marriage that’s stuck. It suffers relationship atrophy. It’s weakened. More prone to injury. For the love of you, your spouse, and your children ... **DON’T STAY STUCK**. Take the first step to transform your marriage today!

Visit **forBetter.us** to access **MARRIAGE in MOTION**. This is where you’ll find brief counseling sessions, presented by Gottman Certified Therapists Zach Brittle and Laura Heck, that are designed to move your marriage forward. No credit card or email registration required. No cost. No strings. No hidden motives.