



**Sue and Jeff Allen**

# 7 Principles of Successful Relationships

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## **We're better together**

We help you connect to other people, learn about yourself and develop honest and mutually fulfilling relationships.



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These are the first steps that helped us turn around our nightmare of a marriage and motivated us to realise that we needed to do something to help our situation - and make sure it didn't happen again in the next relationship down the line.

## 1st principle

### **A relationship can survive anything – AND it needs nurturing, learning and application**

Good marriages don't just happen. How many couples do you know who are really loving and joyous together? If you are lucky enough to know anyone like that, you will also know that they have been through issues together, and worked on their relationship over time. They haven't stayed fighting for long, and they haven't given up and thrown in the towel. Either that, or they are still enjoying an extended honeymoon.

The fact is that every one of us falls in love for the wrong reason, because we think that the other person was sent from heaven to fulfil our every desire. Oops, how wrong we were! But with learning and application you can change your relationship from being for the wrong reasons to being for the right reasons. Right now a happy relationship probably seems far out of reach, but is this present situation enough motivation to find another way?

Everyone needs help with their relationships – even so-called relationship experts need help with their relationships. A happy marriage is one of the most challenging goals we undertake in life, and it is a cornerstone for everything else. It can either be the source of our greatest joy or our greatest unhappiness, and we can choose either way.

## 2nd principle

### You are not powerless

There are tools and techniques you can learn and apply that can free you from the bad feelings. It's important not to run away from your bad feelings because they will follow you wherever you go. We all have them, we all wish we didn't, but they are there to signal that something needs to change. When we feel bad, we think the answer is to change the partner in our life, or our job, or whatever is triggering the distress. But that is like saying that someone else can unscrew the top of our head, reach in and push our buttons in a totally specific way – unless we change this way of thinking that they are to blame, then everything will stay the same.

Our emotional growth and maturity depends on taking responsibility for our own feelings.

Only then can you change them! And our power to change them will change everything else.

## 3rd principle

### Every relationship has a purpose

This is not about how long a relationship lasts for, it's about what lessons it has for us. That's probably easier to identify with past boy/girl friends than with your marriage partner, but even if it seems much more complex now that you are in a marriage or long-term partnership, the same principle applies.

If you are prepared to dig deep, to find and learn the lessons, then the relationship will never have been in vain, no matter what the outcome. You can start to appreciate your partner for what they are showing you, and appreciation stops the fights and re-opens the door to love. There is always something you can appreciate about the other person, even if it's the fact they are still breathing!

And how many people do you know who end one marriage or partnership, only to end up with someone else who seems to be the same? I did that – both my husbands betrayed me for someone else and it took the second disaster for me to learn the lesson of my part in that pattern. Life will present you with another chance to learn the lesson if you don't take this one.

So ask yourself, would you like to continue to suffer, or would you like to learn the lessons that are specifically for you in this relationship?

## 4th principle

### All change starts with communication.

Probably you don't want to talk with your partner about what's happening because you don't want to deal with the mess and the pain of how aggrieved you feel. But when you don't communicate you build a wall between you and the wall gets higher and wider the more the lack of communication goes on. When we were living in the same house with our kids and in the worst of our fights, we would talk to each other through the children; "Ask your father to pass the salt, etc..." Of course it was a nightmare of unspoken yet seething emotion for everyone.

Your relationship cannot move forward without communication, it is the only way to bridge the distances that have built up. About 85% of all conflicts can end when you clear away the misunderstandings and get to talk about what you are experiencing – but ONLY if you don't blame the other person for the whole situation. When you blame the other person then you are stuck with the problem, any potential for change goes out the window. The instant that you blame someone, the fight is only a matter of time away.

The other 15% of all conflicts are the areas of chronic differences for both of you that are now coming to the surface to be mended. And because they want to be mended in you and are probably reminding you of past instances of pain and distress, your instincts are either to fight or to run away. Neither will work – as you know.

Have the courage to today start communicating honestly, without blame. It will change your life.

## 5th principle

### When the honeymoon feeling ends, the fights start – and all relationships balance.

Do you wonder where that honeymoon feeling went? Because what happens when your honeymoon ends is instead of feeling good about all the bits of your partner you fell in love with, you start to feel bad about all the bits you suddenly notice are not so good.

Now the real work begins. As partners spend more time together, the more the deeper, repressed aspects will show up. Only about 2% of what is going on in any argument is to do with the present, the rest is from your past. Both of you have dragged your baggage in from the past. If we get stuck in the fight over these unattractive parts we will be stuck in our lives – and we can create some monumental fights that always result in us losing something.

### Ask yourself:

So in this fight are you the independent, dissociated one, or the dependent, emotional one? Are you the positive partner, always suggesting solutions, or are you the negative one, always pointing out problems? How many other ways are you balancing each other out?

The fact is, there can be no bad guys. We all have an element of responsibility about what is going on. Everyone is always doing their best – and we can all do better.

It really helps to remember this at those times when your partner seems like the worst human being on the planet. You know you are doing your best, you probably spend lots of time talking to your friends and family about how hard you are trying to make it all okay. If you can accept that they are too, despite what it looks like to you, then you have more chance of moving on to the second part together. Of course, we can all do better, and if you are willing to do better, then they will do better as well. Another way of saying that is – they are not going to get better unless you give to them, authentically and wholeheartedly, and make your present relationship more important than your baggage from the past.

Take a good honest look at your major complaints, because in some way you will be balancing out your partner.

## 6th principle

### If there is deadness or distance in your marriage, it's time to take an emotional risk

One of the most destructive qualities in a relationship is that feeling of detachment or distance from your partner. If you have been feeling it, they have been feeling it too. Often we hide it by being busy, working hard, pretending everything's okay, going out and doing extreme sports so that we feel alive some of the time, or just being dutiful.

Sometimes this sense of distance can go on for years, but eventually the numbness in the relationship will either result in bad behaviour like extra-marital affairs, or people trashing their family in order to escape the deadness. Or, if they feel they cannot escape the deadness, it will take its toll with feelings of exhaustion, depression, or even physical illness.

Take an emotional risk by telling your partner how you feel, about them, about the situation, about how your life is. We know you have probably felt for years that you cannot say all that stuff, that it will be the end of everything.

But that's not true. It's the only way to put spice back into your life and into your marriage. When you are being real about what is going on for you, you are at your most irresistible – you are back at the cutting edge of your life, not pretending any more.

Remember as you venture yourself, it's not about going backwards to blaming and fighting. It's about giving yourself totally to the situation and being willing to take that risk for the sake of your relationship.

## 7th principle

### **No one can make you feel anything you are not already feeling – and no one else can make you act on your feelings**

How are you feeling right now? Are you angry, sad, confused, rejected, sick of the situation, wishing things would change?

So how are you acting in your life at the moment? How does your partner or your family experience how you are feeling?

You act because of how you are feeling, and so does everyone else. When we feel positive and happy, usually everyone knows it because of how we act. When we feel aggrieved or upset, usually everyone knows it because of how we act. Or we may try to put a brave face on it and pretend something different (see 6th Principle). But eventually the pressure will be too much and there will be some kind of outburst.

So, knowing how you are feeling, and being able to describe it, is an important skill. The next step is learning not to act out your negative feelings, not to take them out on your partner or other people close to you.

It's easy to say, but we know it isn't easy at all. Because basically this is a huge idea that says we are not victims of circumstances, we have choice and we have power. No matter how much we wish our partner would change, the only person we can really change is ourselves.

Remember that only 2% of what is happening right now is to do with the present, all the rest is about old feelings and reactions to past events. Your partner is triggering those old bad feelings, true. But the feelings are yours. And the choice of how to react is yours.

### **Sue says**

"When I felt betrayed by my husband, (and of course I got everyone else to agree with me about how badly he had behaved) I was hurt, angry and jealous. When I applied the principle that he was setting off old feelings that were already in me, I realised that long ago I had felt betrayed by my father. Not only that, I realised that I had been betraying myself by pretending everything was okay, and being the dutiful and capable wife. Of course, my pretending created distance between us, so then the affairs followed.

This understanding, painful though it was at the time, gave me the power to change my feelings and my reactions. Today I don't fear being betrayed, I am free of that dynamic and it's such a relief"

Be willing to see things differently. Can you stretch yourself enough to think your partner might even be doing you a favour when he or she triggers old bad feelings? Because it's a chance to get them out on the table and deal with them instead of passing them around one more time.

**If you want to explore your situation in more depth then book a coaching session with Sue or Jeff Allen or sign up for one of our events.**