



# When to Stay and When to Go: Research-based Relationship Assessment

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The goal of this presentation is to offer you:

- a systemic approach to assessing most any relationship
- a simple model to make your personal and professional relationship decisions more strategic and effective.

# What are forces?

- Underlying relationships, are **five systems** set up to program your relationship for success or failure.
- A **system** is another word for how you behave; how you organize your relationship; and the underlying assumptions you make about how a relationship should function.

To make this information more personally meaningful...

- You can apply it to:
  - primary love relationships
  - friendships
  - family relationships
  - work relationships

It's human nature to focus on what is wrong with relationships

- There is a practical reason why problems and symptoms get more of our attention:  
***pain!***



# Force #1—SECURITY

- Happy stable relationship systems are **secure**.
- Each person is true to the agreed-upon commitments of the relationship.
- They have an underlying commitment to physical, emotional, financial, and sexual fidelity as well as, safety.
- They are safe because they are **truthful**, forthright, and responsible.
- Arguments never lead to thoughts or threats of leaving.

# Signs the relationship is not secure

- No small issues (which can become a *Catch 22*)
- Reactivity is common and frequent
- Chronic unrest
- Ongoing search for causes of unrest
- Insensitivity to partner's basic needs
- Insensitivity to one's own needs
- Lack of adherence to boundaries
- Avoiding the “elephant in the living room”
- Deficits in the other four major relationship forces

# Examples:

- 1. infidelity
- 2. emotional attachment to another person
- 3. infatuated with another person
- 4. wedded to the job
- 6. primary relationship is with parent or ex
- 7. narcissism
- 8. neurosis
- 9. over-involved with children/grandchildren



# Family subgroups

SPOUSAL/EXECUTIVE

————— ————— ————— ————— ————— ————— —————

PARENTAL

————— ————— ————— ————— ————— ————— —————

SIBLING

# SPOUSAL SUBGROUP

- Best friends, confidants, helpmates, financial partner, social partner, primary supporter, a priority, sounding board for emotions, sensual/sexual partners, lovers.
- The primary person who meets your adult needs.
- Someone who has access to your most intimate thoughts, feelings, needs and wants.
- Someone who is interested in, and responsive to, your emotional state.
- The “go-to” person when good or bad times arise.
- Your attachment figure

# PARENTAL SUBGROUP

- Provides love, structure, protection to children until they can assume responsibility for themselves.
- Is not a peer relationship.
- Parents have more privileges as well as more responsibilities.
- Parents are there to meet the needs of the child—not vice versa.

# SIBLING UNIT

- Peer group where children learn social skills, limits and boundaries, give-and-take, humility, collaboration, cooperation, logical and natural consequences, interpersonal skills and mores.
- Egalitarian except for age.

- # Friends who
- Disrespect your beliefs in conversation and act in
  - Act like your therapist or parent without invitation
  - Demand more of your time than a friendship allows
  - Demand agreement on issues
  - Betray trust
  - Exclude you in activities
  - Only show up in good times
  - Ignore your interests
  - Are self-focused at the exclusion of you

# Colleagues who

- Ignore their responsibilities and put burden on others
- Work harder at getting out of work than working
- Ignore the organizational hierarchy
- Contaminate the culture with foul mood
- Bring issues from home to work
- Distract you from your work
- Criticize beyond the scope of their role
- Breach confidentiality
- Support you publicly and malign you privately

To understand the importance of security, it helps to look at the opposite.

- insecure, impermanent, unstable, unsafe,
- ambivalent, undependable,
- reactive, unattached,
- not committed, inconsistent

Secure relationships meet the terms  
of agreement

- In primary love relationships
- In friendships
- In the family
- At work



# Quick assessment of security

- 1. We both give our relationship the time and attention it needs to thrive.**
- 2. Our communication style is one of our greatest relationship strengths.**
- 3. Our words and actions toward one another are respectful.**
- 4. We are both careful about keeping our commitment strong.**
- 5. We both work to make our relationship financially secure.**
- 6. We both adhere to the expected behaviors.**

Secure relationships meet the terms of attachment

- Show up
- Tune in
- Understand
- Act congruently

Turns out, understanding is far more important than you might think

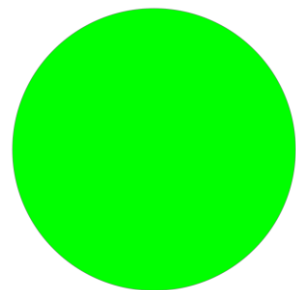
- Love, trust, and caring do not work without understanding.
- If I say “I love you,” but I don’t know you, I am loving a fantasy in my head.
- Real understanding requires a level of acceptance.
- Understanding does not mean agreeing.

# We are genetically programmed to seek belonging

- Belonging requires mutual understanding.
- We all do better in an environment where we are understood.
  - Students
  - Patients
  - Neighborhoods

Lack of understanding is an underlying factor in burnout.

Why is this important?



# How to strengthen security

- Examine your commitment
- Take action to strengthen your commitment
- Ask if your partner/friend/colleague feels secure
- Ask what you can do to strengthen security
- Spend more quality time together
- Listen to and remember your other's wishes
- Make sure you understand your others' point of view on important matters
- Behave in a way that shows you are committed
- Increase the level of trust

# Quick assessment of relationship equity.

- 6. Our relationship feels fair.**
- 7. Our connection grows with each passing year.**
- 8. We are known for our support of one another.**
- 9. We balance our time and energy in a way that benefits one another as well as the relationship.**
- 10. We are good at meeting one another's needs.**

# Look at the opposite of fair.

- Would you want a relationship that was:
- Unfair
- Deceitful
- Dishonest
- Unreasonable
- Unsympathetic
- One-sided
- Immoral



When it comes to creating fairness and equity in a relationship

- Self-absorbed
- Entitled
- Narcissistic individuals fall short

Common complaints in an unfair relationship

*I'm not happy*

*I work harder than you.*

*You don't see what needs to be done.*

*This isn't working.*

*I feel unappreciated.*

*I feel unsupported.*

*I feel alone.*

Keep in mind:

- Inequity builds resentment.
- Resentment leads to criticism.
- Criticism can lead to contempt.
- Contempt signals the end of the relationship.

# Resentment caused by inequity can create a void...

- Resentment is often a combination of appreciation, and feeling like you don't have a choice
- “Yes, but, I like the money.”
- “Yes, but, the sex is great.”
- “Yes, but, he's so handsome.”
- “Yes, but, I love her family.”
- “Yes, but, we've been together forever.”
- “ I don't want to spend the energy to change”

# Fairness can change over time

- Relationships have to be evaluated for fairness as they develop.
- Relationships have to be evaluated for fairness over time.
- Relationships have to be evaluated as personal needs change.

# To increase equity in the relationship

- Ask your partner if the relationship feels fair.
- Express appreciation in the ways your partner desires.
- Ask how you can help.
- Be generous with your resources.
- Make sure you are pulling your weight.
- Adapt your role to changing times and transitions.
- **Transform** resentment, criticism, and blame into desires.
- Ask, “what is it like living with me?”
- Would you want your favorite child to be in a relationship with someone just like you?

## Force #3--RELATIONAL

- Do you think and act like a person in this relationship?

# Do you consider the other(s) in your actions and decision-making?

- Do you act like a team member?
- Are you collaborative?
- Are you amenable to the desires and opinions of others?
- Are you considerate?
- Are you attuned to the needs of the relationship?
- Are you interested in the wants and needs of others?
- Do you check in with the other(s) regularly?
- Do you update your information as times change?



Would you want to be in a relationship with someone:

- Self-absorbed
- Self-centered
- Selfish
- Rigid
- Who thinks unilaterally (*It's all about me!*)
- Uninterested and unconcerned about your feelings, thoughts, or preferences
- Preoccupied with their own thoughts, feelings and interests
- Acts “single” when so inclined

Again, when it comes to creating a relational partnership,

- self-absorbed,
- entitled,
- narcissistic individuals fall short.

# Quick assessment of relationality

- 11. We each make decisions with the other person in mind.**
- 12. We each feel like a priority in one another's lives.**
- 13. Our commitment is strong even when we are apart for a period of time.**
- 14. Our relationship truly feels like teamwork.**
- 15. We willingly make sacrifices to please one another.**
- 16. We function as team.**

Being relational is not just being fair...

- It's care or concern for your another's feelings, thoughts, or desires.

# Good bad examples of the lack of relationality.

- . Refusing to attend partner's family events.
- . Being unkind or indifferent to partner's family.
- . Refusing to support partner's work requirements.
- . Being rigid about family decisions such as childcare, religious participation, food, travel, visiting, politics, money, time.
- . Refusing to support another's personal goals such as further education, socializing with friends, hobbies.
- . Being inflexible regarding gender roles.
- . Refusing to address normal expectations in a committed love relationship such as affection, sex, sharing household duties, sharing financial gains, socializing together, keeping the home in a comfortable fashion.

If this seems too controlling...

- Think systemically.
- It's not about critiquing every single action.
- It's about conjoint thinking.
- Making decisions, acting, with the other person in mind.

Individuals who think relationally might not even know they are doing it.

- *How was your day?*
- *Here's what happened today.*
- *What do you think about this?*
- *I think it's time for some romance.*
- *I'm thinking about...what do you think?*
- *Thanksgiving is coming, what are your thoughts?*
- *Anything I can do to help?*
- *Let me take care of that.*

# Creating a more relational system

1. Talk about expectations.
2. Cover major concerns before they happen.
3. Seek input from your partner on a regular basis.
4. When you drop the ball, be the first to admit it.  
(note there are different ways of “admitting it”)
5. Agree ahead of time how you will communicate when agreements are not being met.
6. Be willing to amend your agreements if need be.
7. Make it a point to revisit positive experiences from the past that include the two of you.



# Force #4--FLEXIBLE

- Able to adapt to changing circumstances
- Easygoing
- Accommodating
- Forgiving
- Open-minded
- Changeable
- Willing to negotiate
- Obliging

# If you don't quite understand the benefit of flexibility,

- consider living with someone who is:
- rigid, inflexible, stiff, intractable, unyielding, set in opinion.
- *Who wants to sign on for that?!*
  
- If you have lived or worked with someone unalterably opposed to change
- who is oppositional
- who is defiant
- who demands “my way or the highway”
  
- It's not fun, it's stressful.

# Quick assessment of flexibility

**16. Our relationship manages the inevitable ups and downs very well.**

**17. We are comfortable taking on different roles in our relationship.**

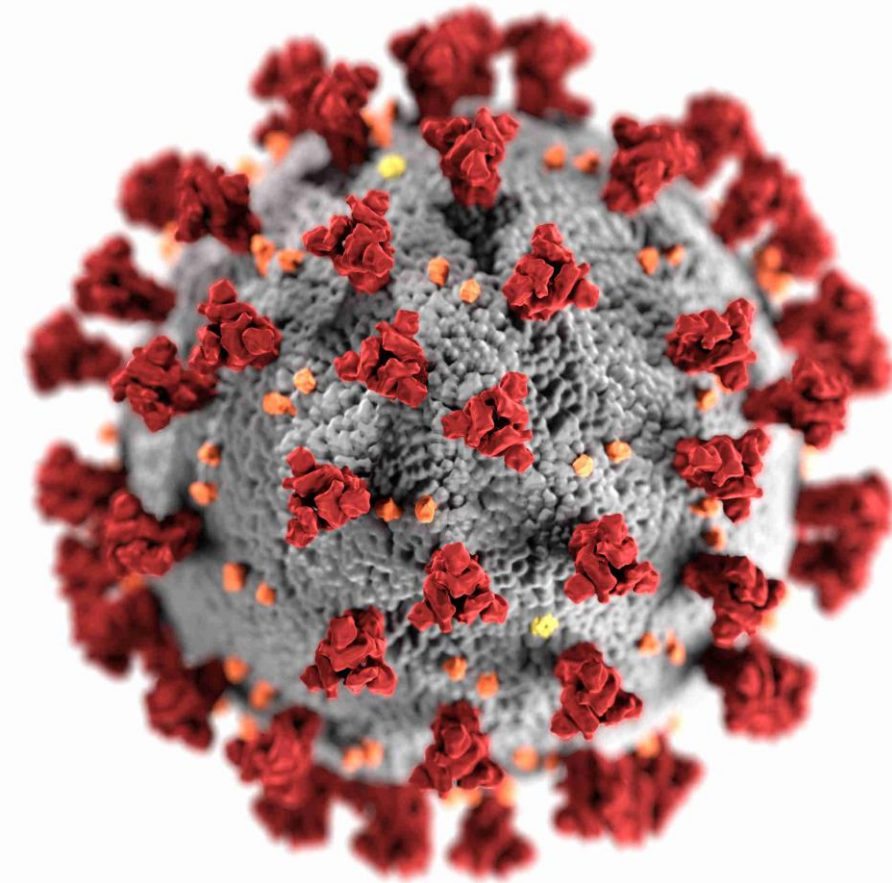
**18. When plans don't work out the way we want, we are capable of making new plans together in a comfortable fashion.**

**19. We manage change well.**

**20. We manage our differences well.**

# The inevitability of change

- Life is guaranteed to require adjustments over time



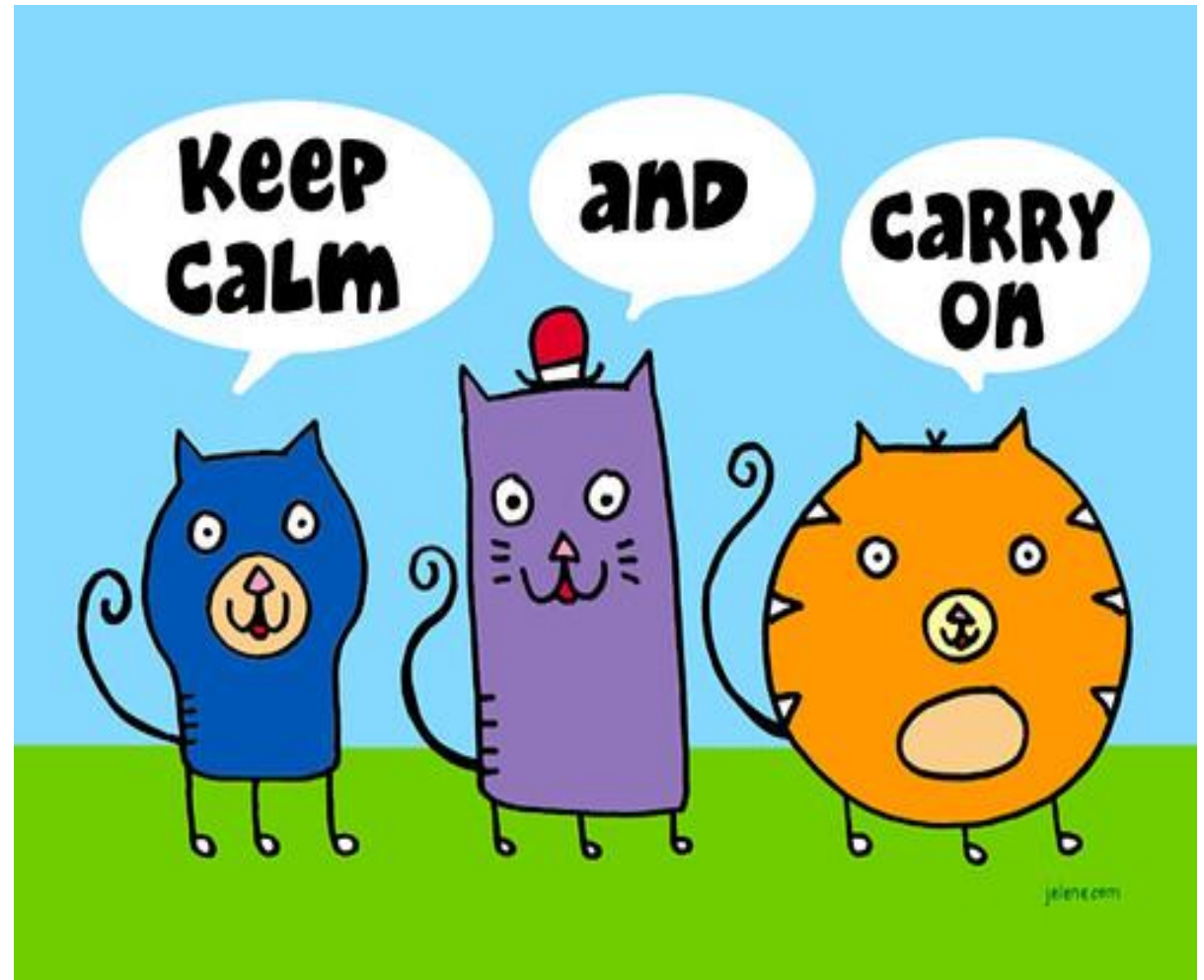
∞ list of possible  
∞ limited.

# Think about negotiating these normal life experiences with a rigid, inflexible person.

- Moving
- Selling a home
- Relationship conflict
- Unemployment
- Financial hardship
- Disasters such as fire, flood, hurricanes
- Illness, chronic illness
- Disability
- Children with disability or special needs
- Caregiving demands
- Lifestyle downsizing
- Death of a close family member

The key to flexibility is

- Emotional regulation
- The ability to...



# To be more flexible

1. **Think out-of-the-box.**

2. **Stay in the moment.** Most anxiety and fear comes from catastrophizing the future, thinking the worst that could happen and dwelling on it.

3. **If you tend to react instead of respond; if your first reaction to any change is to reject it; *just don't do something, stand there.***

4. **Reappraise the situation.** You've likely heard: "Rejection is protection."

5. **Stay productive.** "Just do the next right thing."

6. **Use others as a resource.**

- **Get advice.** Most problems are universal and others have navigated them successfully so don't be afraid to seek advice.
- **Stay positive.** Negative thinking can overwhelm you and make flexibility virtually impossible.

# Force #5--VITAL

- Is the relationship full of life?
- Do you share goals and aspirations?
- Do you share a passion?
- Are you interesting and interested?
- Are you actively involved in keeping the relationship going?
- Is your relationship growing together or growing apart?



# Consider the opposite

- Boring
- Cold
- Dull
- Dying
- Lifeless
- Uncaring
- Stagnant
- Growing apart

## Quick assessment for vitality

- 21. We make it a point to keep our relationship fresh and interesting.**
- 22. We have several activities we enjoying doing together.**
- 23. We each make an effort to make our relationship fun.**
- 24. We each make an effort to keep ourselves attractive to one another.**
- 25. We show interest in one another.**

# Vitality is easy to discount

- **Warning signs:**

- *You are bored when together.*
- *Best times happen with others.*
- *Your sex life is an oxymoron.*
- *The vision of your life following this same pattern makes you depressed.*
- *You resent the fact that you thought the relationship would be far more enjoyable.*
- *The relationship feels like more of a burden than a boost.*
- *You fantasize about life with someone else.*

# I interviewed several happy, stable couples

- *I know he has my back.*
- *She has supported me through some tough times.*
- *He is my best friend.*
- *She is my best friend.*
- *He is always there for me.*
- *We each anticipate one another's needs.*
- *She gives direction to my life and keeps me on course.*
- *He will tell me when I am wrong—but at the right time, in the right way.*
- *She's my first choice to spend time with.*
- *She takes care of me.*
- *I'm always in her plans.*
- *He makes me a priority.*

# Advantages to a vital relationship

- Vitality is highly correlated with happiness and well-being, both personally and relationally.
- A vital person has contagious energy. Because of this, they get invited to parties, asked to serve on committees, get befriended by others, and have high mate value in relationships.
- Vital people bring out the best in others. Their *joie de vivre*—enjoyment of life—is contagious.
- Vital people are more enjoyable and employable.
- It's no coincidence that one of the most common phrases lover's use during the infatuation stage is, "I feel more alive!"

# Loneliness is lethal

- Loneliness has a greater chance of shortening your life than:
  - Being obese
  - Having high blood pressure
  - Smoking
  - Being inactive

On the contrary,

- Having close personal relationships is one of the greatest predictors of a long life
- Couples who have a vital relationship don't experience the loneliness reported by a third of all married people.
- This fact alone, makes a great case for a vital relationship.

# To increase vitality

- Increase your personal interest.
- Practice emotional regulation.
- Focus on the positive aspects of life.
- Use challenges as opportunities.
- Express admiration for others in your life.
- Take steps to develop a joint passion—or at least an individual passion you can share with others.