

a HeartMath e-Book



improving relationships

 HeartMath®

Improving Relationships

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We appreciate and support your interest in the HeartMath System, and in learning how to use your own heart's intelligence as an efficient source of intuition and answers to apply to all areas of your life.

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Improving Relationships

Some of the richest moments in our lives—as well as the most painful ones—take place in relationships with other people. Building and sustaining relationships require that we lead with the heart and manage our attitudes and emotions along the way.

The qualities that nurture long-term relationships with friends and lovers are the qualities of the heart: care, non-judgment, respect, authenticity in communication, appreciation, compassion, and forgiveness. It is a lack of these qualities that injures relationships and makes them difficult to sustain. Whether it's the tender vulnerability of intimate love, the mature appreciation of marriage, or the compassionate warmth of friendship, the quality of our heartfelt feelings is what deepens our relationships.

Part I: Lead with your Heart

Learning to lead with the heart in developing relationships bears some explanation. For instance you could easily say, "Wait a minute. I've followed my heart before and gotten hurt and stepped on." It's a common experience. You trust someone, believing they care for you as you care for them, only to discover that your values or expectations aren't the same or that they're out for themselves at your expense. The shock of this realization is so common, in fact, that learning to handle it with grace is one of the rites of passage to adulthood.

With experience, we begin to see the warning signals sooner and soften the blow. But inside, many people look back on those events with a bitterness that's toxic and self-destructive. Believing that following the heart got them hurt, they cut themselves off from the spontaneous expression of the heart. They become guarded and slow to love. "My heart got me into this," they think.

Here's the distinction. Following your heart is about operating from an intelligent, self-secure place inside where wisdom, intuition and understanding reside. It means living from the guidance of your true core values, authenticity and integrity. This involves building a relationship with your own heart first.

Leading with the heart often gets confused with raw emotion and they are not the same thing. Just because you feel something strongly, it doesn't mean that emotion is being driven by the heart. The unmanaged mind often hijacks our emotions to defend its own desires, projections and fears, whether they are aligned with the intuitive guidance of the heart or not.

When you're first learning to make the distinction, it's easy to be fooled. But there's a big difference between the mind driving our desires and the place of true heart we're talking about here. So the most important relationship to understand is the one between our mind and heart. Then we are more likely to understand the hearts of other people.

In fostering relationships with others, an intelligent, heart-based approach is to offer an encouraging environment for the expression of

feelings, no matter how sensitive they might be. This increases the possibility of a genuine heart-felt connection between you. As you continue to build on this connection, your relationship deepens and grows.

One of the most important contributors to good relationships is authenticity in communication. Authentic communication nurtures understanding and loyalty in relationships. Positive experiences of communication, no matter how subtle, build confidence and understanding between people. It's this sincerity and heart connection that sustains or renews relationships, despite challenges, separation, or time.

Good communication starts with becoming more heart vulnerable, which means listening to our own hearts and learning how to become more honest about what we're really feeling. Being heart vulnerable is not the same as being emotionally weak. The term in this context means being open to what you are feeling and perceiving, then honestly questioning that to gain more clarity.

Heart vulnerability builds strength in relationships. It's a highly aware state that allows you to know what you are feeling and gives you the courage to be open about it. A higher degree of heart vulnerability is a cornerstone of authentic communication.

Authentic communication requires both learning how to speak your truth from a genuine heart vulnerable place and especially learning how to listen more deeply. Slowing down and making a sincere effort to listen can help keep the communication bond intact. It helps you be

aware of your partner's deeper feelings, bringing a more sensitive, essence-based understanding.

HeartMath research has found that good listening involves hearing on three levels.

- 1) Words (what is actually said)
- 2) Feelings (the emotions behind the words)
- 3) Essence (what the words and feelings combined really mean)

Good listening starts with paying close attention to the actual words being said. This is important, of course, but unfortunately we often stop there; and this is where most miscommunication happens. Most arguments or misunderstandings are over words said—even when it wasn't really what was meant. The Word Level only paints a part of the picture.

The next level in communication is the Feeling Level. This is where a deeper understanding can be found. When listening, try to really feel what the person is saying and try to understand the emotions that are driving what is being said. Often words say one thing but the feelings another. This is the signal to listen more deeply which leads to getting at the most important level of communication—the Essence Level.

The Essence Level of communication is where you find the understanding needed to get the real meaning of what someone is trying to communicate to you. In order to do this, you have to slow down what's going on inside your own mind and feelings. It also requires remaining open and neutral.

When listening for the Essence Level of a communication, try to appreciate the other person as he is speaking. No matter what is going on, appreciate him for who he is. By holding a feeling of appreciation, you will be increasing your own sensitivity while offering a “safe zone” for him to openly communicate.

Next, try to remain neutral about what is being said. Don’t form opinions too quickly. Let the person finish talking before jumping to conclusions.

Lastly, try not to interrupt. When someone is speaking to you, let him finish without trying to complete his sentences for him.

If you want to enhance your relationships, apply these three steps when listening:

1. Listen closely to the words.
2. Try to determine what feelings are behind those words.
3. Appreciate the listener, remain neutral, don’t interrupt and look for an understanding of the essence of the communication—the real meaning.

Listening this way offers a gesture of care and respect. People crave understanding. They want you to hear them. Listening deeply to one another goes a long way towards maintaining the respect and understanding that creates enrichment in relationships.

Part II: Falling in Love

In the early stages of an intimate relationship, our bodies release hormones and brain chemicals of love that give us a natural high. The easy, intense connection, wide-open feelings of surrender and synchronicity, and the rich textures of feeling totally alive can take us far beyond our everyday emotional experiences. As great as it feels to be on top of the world, this is exactly the time to make sure we are managing our emotions.

There's an important difference between surrendering to the heart for the sake of love and placing the responsibility for our happiness in the hands of our partners. When we're in love, we have to listen carefully to our quiet heart signals and not let our personal desires override them. Surrendering that responsibility to another means that if the other person doesn't fulfill our expectations, we are in danger of recoiling with disappointment and closing our hearts to what could have been a great relationship.

Here's an analogy. Imagine you love to sail. You go sailing as often as you can and always enjoy it. But one fine day, a perfect wind comes along and fills your sails. You feel like you're gliding on air. You marvel at how in sync you are with the wind and you say to yourself, "I feel like I could just release the tiller and surrender to the wind!" If you give into that persuasive urge and lose touch with the tiller, you'll soon find your sails flapping in the wind. In a similar way if you suspend your own emotional balance and security in a new relationship, your romantic illusions could be dashed on the rocks. Emotional balance allows you to dance with the wind, but keep hold of the tiller.

Keeping Your Balance

We can easily delude ourselves when we fall in love. The desires and biochemistry of love can blind us to the deeper heart discernment about how compatible we are with the other person. In the beginning, it's nearly impossible to see past the big brown eyes, gorgeous body or drop-dead smile. Your radar screen is jammed. Your thoughts and emotions are no help at all—they continuously reinforce your desire! Without emotional management, your perception of your partner can become inflated by your desire, idealizing his or her qualities.

A lot of people assume that emotional management is only for negative feelings. The truth is we need balance just as much when we are feeling exuberant. Over-identity with excitement or emotionalism can pull us out of balance and right into stress. Sustaining the joy and novelty of a relationship requires staying in contact with your heart intelligence. Otherwise, the initial high can get lost in a “happy head” and you lose contact with your heart intuition and emotional balance. Without emotional balance, expectations and attachments can drain the juice right out of love.

Here's an example. At first you love being together and doing caring things for each other. In this heightened emotional state, insecurities inside you that haven't been addressed start showing up in dependency. Your expectations start making everything harder and more loaded. Then, if the person you love does something that doesn't match those expectations, you feel hurt or even betrayed. As soon as you tell yourself he wouldn't do that if he really loved you, over identity about your unmet expectations starts to create problems.

Sustaining emotional balance in relationships is so important because it allows you to build a strong heart security within yourself. With that security, you don't get pulled aside so easily by what the other person does or doesn't do. You don't lose your own center in relationships.

Non-judgment

Once over-identity and expectation have drained away the initial purity of a loving relationship, the judgments start to set in.

When we speak of judgments here, we're talking about being judgmental. When things don't go our way and remain unresolved, we can start to see from a slant, point the finger and consider ourselves superior. Our heart starts to cut off from the other person, which either pushes him away or we pull away. This is how most relationships fall apart.

Practicing neutral and non-judgment in relationships is more allowing. You don't close your eyes to something you don't like, but you talk about it from a neutral and non-judgmental place to better understand the other person's view. If you want to maintain a relationship, instead of quickly identifying someone's faults, try seeing him through the eyes of neutral and of appreciation. As you make even small efforts to appreciate the other person while addressing a problem, your entire spirit is enhanced by that generous, life-giving quality. By practicing neutral and appreciation, new solutions are more likely to emerge.

When your heart is on-line, you will have less tendency to focus on negative things about other people. It doesn't mean you'll like or agree with everything you see; that's not the point. But your own measuring,

confining opinions will not have such a vice grip on you. By including the heart, you can still have your opinions, but you have other choices as well—like compassion, non-judgment, neutral and appreciation that can keep the relationship nurtured and growing. When two people are both making efforts to suspend judgment and add compassion and appreciation, it creates a powerful bond that nurtures the relationship through the ups and downs.

Part III: Building Healthy Relationships

Studies have shown that regardless of culture, age group, or social status, people who lack close and meaningful relationships have a significantly higher risk of mortality. They are more susceptible to disease and have reduced survival rates after a heart attack.

Researchers and physicians have found that supportive relationships play a major role in people's health and vitality. Emotional support from friends and loved ones has a positive effect on the cardiovascular, hormonal, and immune systems. It can quite literally lower our blood pressure and our cholesterol.

Researchers have also found, however, that if you don't have strong, loving relationships with others, it can be as great a health risk as cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, obesity or lack of exercise. When people feel lonely for extended periods of time, their physical health suffers. Jim Lynch, the author of *The Broken Heart: The Medical Consequences of Loneliness* says, "Almost every segment of our society seems to be deeply afflicted by one of the major diseases of our age—human loneliness. Loneliness is not only pushing our culture to the breaking point, but is also pushing our physical health to the

breaking point, and indeed has in many cases already pushed the human heart beyond the breaking point.”

It's eye-opening to know that the effects of loneliness can be that afflicting, so you can do something about it. If you feel lonely you can always turn to your own best friend—the heart—to make contact with your own self-security and the wonderful feelings that reside there.

When you find yourself feeling lonely, try this simple technique. Focus your attention in the area of the heart and radiate an attitude of appreciation to anything or anyone that you care about or love, then extend that love out to more people, nature, and life. Keep radiating the attitude or feeling of appreciation, while listening to your heart intuition about what you can do to express more love and care in your daily life. Giving love to other people is one of the most powerfully effective ways to eliminate loneliness.

Practice radiating from the heart daily until you can lock onto positive feelings for longer periods and express them more fully to others. In the process, your loneliness will subside and you will naturally develop more rewarding relationships as you learn to stay open to what your heart says.

By keeping your heart open and loving, you can feel heart-connected to others and gain needed social support whether you are in a close, loving relationship or not.

The Trust Trap

Everyone wants to be able to trust their relationships. And yet even a small breach of trust can cause a rift between lovers, friends, relatives or business partners that lasts for years or even a lifetime.

Why do we feel wounded so easily by other people's words or actions? It's all because of our emotional expectations. Suppose you've been looking forward to spending some intimate time with your partner. You've gone out of your way to make special preparations for the evening and have even spent a little time basking in the glow of how wonderful it's going to be. But when evening comes, your partner is distracted or indifferent. Instantly, you feel hurt.

Maybe this has happened before. You've tried not to make judgments or assume the worse, but every time it happens and your expectations are dashed, the tension rises just a little higher. Maybe you've even learned to "numb" your hurt feelings, but they keep coming up again when you least expect them. Before you know it, your partner will say or do some minor, unrelated thing that will trigger this pile of stored-up emotions and they'll come bursting out.

Your unmanaged emotions are almost sure to turn a minor miscommunication into a major stumbling block. If you allow this to become a pattern in your relationship, it will soon lose its appeal. Strangely enough, that moment may not mean that you were in the wrong relationship, just that your unmanaged emotions sabotaged whatever potential it might have had.

If you have come to this point in your relationship, suspending judgment and trying to communicate your feelings authentically can help. Your heart intuition can guide you on how to initiate the heart vulnerable communication and appreciation needed to unearth hidden agendas, help clear them up, and get your relationship back on track. Having the courage to identify subtle anxieties and over-identities in yourself is half the battle. Communicating them without blame and judgment to your partner is the other half you need for release and progress.

More times than not, when we are fearful about opening up to someone else, it's because we're trying to get security from outside ourselves, instead of from inside. Emotional maturity involves building trustworthiness first within ourselves, then extending that to others.

Learning to trust your own heart will give you more latitude and compassion for others. It will allow you to have more emotional flexibility, so you don't deplete your energies just because someone has offended your sense of trust.

You'll also find you are more fair with others, when you remain centered in your heart. You will be better able to avoid labeling someone "untrustworthy" just because she bruised your ego or produced disappointed expectations in your world.

Relationships are founded on love, vulnerability, authentic communication and a strong connection—with other people and within yourself. While you work to improve your relationships with others,

spend time getting into a better relationship with yourself. In that way, you will bring more heart security to all of your relationships.

Whatever happens in the course of your relationships, be sure to genuinely appreciate the depth of your experience and what you have learned. Appreciate the other people for having been part of your learning, whether they have been in your life briefly or over many years.

Relationships are one of the greatest joys of life. They improve the quality of our experience and even enhance our health and longevity. But remember, no matter how wonderful and enriching our relationships are, lasting fulfillment can never come from another person. It is our relationship with our heart that offers us a boundless supply of love, care, compassion, appreciation and joy. Only when we have found that within ourselves can we share this great bounty with others.

Next Steps

In this e-booklet we've tried to provide insightful information that can help you improve relationships. The process of building better relationships by becoming self-secure, communicating authentically and reducing judgments takes a little time and genuine care. In order to expand upon what you've learned and to provide additional help we'd like to suggest some additional resources.

In the book *The HeartMath Solution*, by Doc Childre and Howard Martin, you can learn a lot more about the power of the heart and tools for developing the emotional management needed to foster deeper relationships. This book provides an excellent and

comprehensive overview of the HeartMath System and is full of practical “how to” information.

Our technology offerings are also recommended. The *emWave® Personal Stress Reliever®*, a small mobile device and *emWave® PC*, a PC based program, utilize a patented process for improving heart/brain communication that deepens the connection with your own heart intuition. Using either of these tools can help you experience more rewarding emotions while reducing the debilitating effects of stress. Regular use of these tools can help you find the emotional balance needed for developing rewarding relationships.

Lastly, one of the best ways to learn HeartMath tools and techniques is through personal training. We offer a four session course conducted over the phone called *Voyage to Heart Intelligence*. From the convenience of your home or office you can learn and practice HeartMath techniques under the caring guidance of a trained professional. This personalized approach to training is an excellent way to learn and experience the benefits of HeartMath.

To learn more about tools, techniques, resources and training programs that can help you develop better relationships and cultivate a state of coherence and emotional balance, please visit our web site at www.heartmath.com or call us toll free at 800-450-9111.

We wish you all the best in finding and maintaining the relationships you want in your life. Take care!