

Communication – Secret #1

When it comes to communication there must be several aspects reacting together or it will not take place. There must be a speaker, there must be a listener (this is where communication usually breaks down), there must be a message (sometimes the culprit for communication problems), a method for delivering the message, and, finally, there should be a response from the listener. Ok, that's it, got it?

The thing to remember is that all aspects of the above process must take place in any relationship or it will not survive. Communication is the water that keeps the relational organism alive.

This might be hard for some women, but it is especially hard for men. We men **MUST** engage in every aspect of the communication process or you will be alone for most of your life. If you want human interaction, you must go through the communication process.

Remember when you first started dating your partner and neither of you would ever be quiet? You would go on and on about a thousand different things. Then, fast forward to the average married couple. They sit and eat, not saying much of anything. Why? Is it because they have run out of things to say? Surely not.

What do you talk about? Well, that is not too hard of a question to answer. We will give that to you soon, in an exercise.

Exercise 1

Write down the things about which you and your partner talk in an average conversation. Do this before going to on for maximum benefit for exercise 1.

The Five Levels of Communication

Level 1 – Cliché conversation – “How are you?” “What’s up?” No personal sharing as each person remains behind his/her defenses. Polite conversation about the weather, etc.

Level 2 – Reporting the facts about others – talk about what other have said, but no personal information. Gossip and little narrations, but no feelings talk.

Level 3 – Ideas and Judgments – the risking of telling your ideas and decisions, but cautions. The giving of your opinion. If what is being said is not accepted, the person risking may retreat. Real communication begins to unfold here.

Level 4 – Feelings and Emotions – The sharing of how a person feels about facts, ideas, and judgments. The person begins to reveal himself/herself.

Level 5 – Complete emotional and personal communication – The person is able to discuss any aspect about himself/herself without being self-conscious. Talk and relationship based on total openness and honesty. This is where you risk being totally transparent, all the while knowing the other person may reject what you say.

Adapted from Powell, John. (1969). *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* Allen, TX: Tabor Publishing Co.

Now get out the answers for Exercise 1 and put a 1 through 5 next to what you put down that you usually discuss. Notice which number shows up the most. The lower the numbers and the lower the level of communication and the less meaningful and deep your conversations. A relationship cannot last in the lower levels of conversation. To deepen and strengthen your relationship, try to get to the higher levels and talk about things that are more meaningful.

Steps to Becoming a More Effective Listener

1. Listen (notice that word was not interrupt) – Look at the person, concentrate on what they are saying, don't say a word, and don't multitask.
2. Walk in their shoes – be able to explain the opinion and side of your partner. Again, listen and don't interrupt.
3. Reflect – without editorializing, repeat what the person has just told you. Discuss what it is like as you walk in their shoes. Don't forget to use the same feelings language your partner used (especially if you are male).
4. Know the MIT – Storytellers are told to talk only about one thing – the most important thing. This applies to couples as well. When you are done reflecting, ask the person what the MIT is about what they are saying and trying to convey. Remember steps 1 and 2.
5. Change? – When your partner is done answering step 4 ask, “How can I help you with the MIT?” Go back to steps 1 and 2, but try to accomplish the answer.

You might be thinking that this seems simple and/or unrealistic, but it is what all good communicators do, even good debaters. If you are a good communicator, you do this. If you have a good relationship you communicate.

Portions adapted from - Alpha Resources. (2002) *The Marriage Course Manual*.

So when you need to increase the level of communication to something more deep, about what do you talk? The best method is to use the acronym APPLE.

A – Appreciation
P – Problem
P – Positive
L – Life
E – Enigma

A – Appreciation. Anything big or small that you appreciate about your partner. It could be as simple as your partner picking up their socks off of the bedroom floor to something that took more effort like watching the kids for four hours. REMEMBER – be specific.

P – Problem. Something that is a problem between you and your partner. This should not be a time for blame or judgment and this is not the time to solve the problem, you are simply stating it. While some couple are very good at this section, others hesitate to give any problems at all. A couple must discuss problems or the unmentioned problems will build and build until the explode. Use the following formula when sharing a problem:

When you (specific behavior) I feel (feeling) can you give me (requested behavior in the place of the problematic behavior) ?

Notes – when mentioning the behavior, state only the action that the person did and do not add commentary or opinion. When stating feelings, do not say, “I feel LIKE...” Using “like” makes it a judgment and not a feeling. Use the following: happy, sad, angry, confused, scared, exhausted or powerless, and/or strong or powerful. Finally, don’t forget to mention what you need from them so that they know what to do in place of the problem.

P – Positive. This should be something that happened to you recently that is positive and/or fun. It can, but does not have to involve your partner.

L – Life. Something that happened to you recently. Something at work or that took place in your day.

E – Enigma. Something about which you are confused or something about which you are unsure of how to solve. If there is something that has been worrying you talk about it with you partner. You both can try to work it out at this time.

Remember – Do this daily. This is not a discussion (until the enigma), so try not to comment on what the other person is saying. It should only take about 15 minutes for both of you to go through the script or acronym. You may feel strange using this script, but when you both first started dating, you most likely went through it without knowing it. Continue going through it. Couples having trouble only share the problem with each other.

Motto of this section – An APPLE a day keeps the counselor away

Conflict Resolution – Secret #2

The ability to resolve conflict is dependent upon the foundation of the relationship. Just as you cannot remodel or “fix” a house if the foundation is unstable, you cannot work on a relationship when the foundation is not solid. This is why communication and all the other marital strategies are so important and why you have to exercise preventative maintenance when it comes to a successful marriage. Only going to the doctor or dentist when something is wrong, most likely, will not help your health. Similarly, only working on your relationship when you have conflict will not help the health of your relationship. Work on your relational foundation now and get into the practice of arguing well.

“Conflict is not the problem in marriage, unresolved conflict is the problem. 69% of all marital conflicts and marital problems are unresolvable.”

- John Gottman – Marriage and Family expert

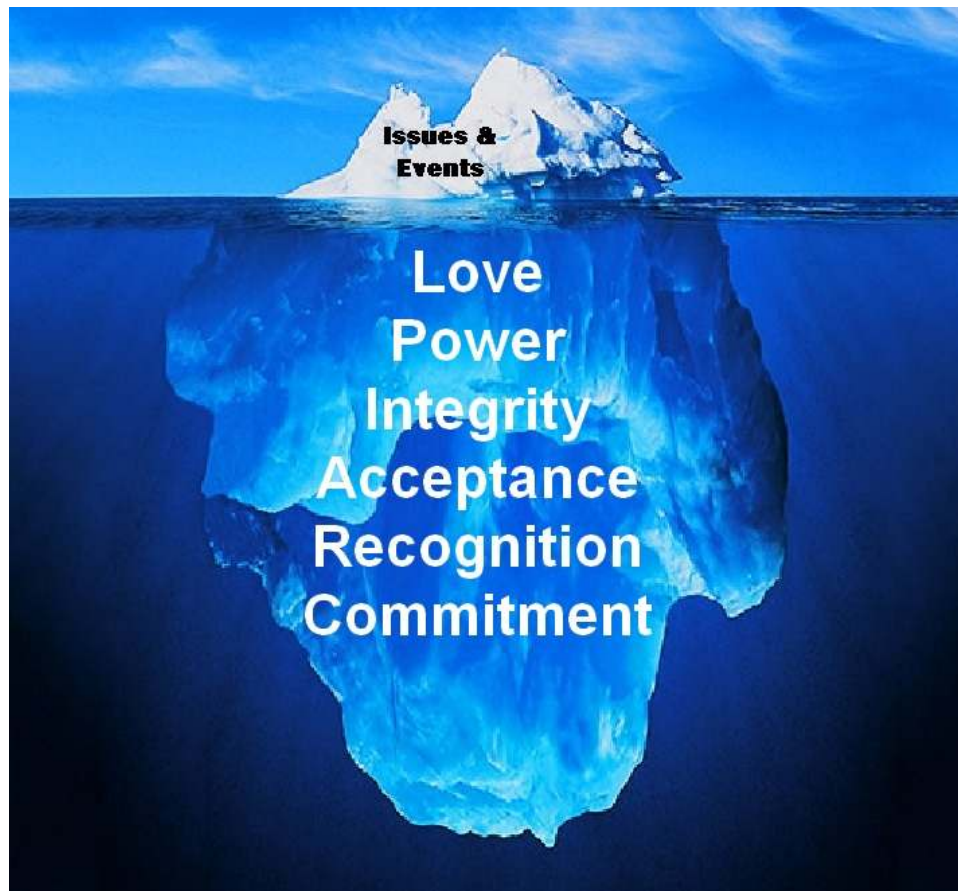
So what do you do? You try to work together and come to a compromise. These exercises will help you do this.

Conflict Iceberg

The things about which couples usually argue are the issues and events. These are not the problem! The problems are the feels and thoughts that are deep and personal. These underlying, core thoughts must be addressed in a delicate, but necessary manner.

The Titanic and most other ships were not sunk by hitting the ice that is above the water. The ship was sunk before it even got to the small part above, it was sunk by the mass of problem that is below the surface. The part that is not obvious and the part that cannot be seen.

When most couples argue over money, the real issue is not how should get to spend what, but the real issue is who is feeling less power, less recognition of their abilities and decision making, and/or less love because they cannot have the freedom that is given to most other partners. The power, recognition, and love are the things about which the couple should talk. Men, you have to talk about these things even though it can be very difficult. Women, it may be difficult for you as well, but you must do it also. Both of you must discuss what is below the water.



10 Steps to Resolve Conflict

1. Have a set time to argue and a set place. If you do not have these two things you will argue in front to others and perhaps in front of the children (which is a form of child abuse).
2. What is the most important issue to discuss and be as specific as possible?
3. What are you doing to contribute to the problem? What is your partner doing to contribute to the problem?
4. What have you tried in the past that has not worked to help to resolve the problem?
5. What are some solutions that you could try to help solve the problem or issue?
6. Objectively evaluate each suggestion from part 5 above.
7. Select one solution that seems to work for both and agree to try it.
8. How can your work to help the one solution work? What can your partner do to help the solution work?
9. Set a time and place for next week to discuss how things are going.
10. Try to notice if your partner is making an effort to accomplish the solution from step seven. If they are making an effort, it will greatly help both of you if you praise his/her effort.

Personality – Secret #3

Personality defined - The totality of qualities and traits, as of character or behavior, that are peculiar to a specific person

Jung is considered to be the father of personality type. Around WWII a mother and daughter (Myers and Briggs) worked out a system called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). You may have heard about it or have even taken the assessment.

Many couples say they “know” their partner, but do they really know the deeper personality of their partner? This review will help you to begin thinking about this.

Individuals often become frustrated when their partner does not want to go out to a party or when they go out too much, or they are confused when the partner is obsessed with details or when they seem to what to fly by the seat of their pants. The key to this section is to know your partner’s personality type and to accept it, warts and all. If you expect the person to change to suit you, you are expecting them to be who they are not

Personality Types

How we recharge our energy

Extraversion – likes to socialize and talk, but may seem shallow and superficial to others

Introversion – likes to be by themselves, seems withdrawn and reserved

How we perceive our world

Sensing – they use the five senses to find the concrete and factual, the details

Intuition – Thinks outside the box, likes the big picture, more abstract thinking

How we act on things or how we make decisions

Thinking – reasons for decisions, likes using logic and their mind

Feeling – goes with their hunches, uses their heart

How we react toward the world around us, what we show to the world

Judging – scheduled and structured, likes to plan

Perceiving – a free spirit, flexible, spontaneous

What does all of this personality types stuff mean? Our personality comes from our genes, upbringing, environment, and experiences. Our personality is very strong and not much can change it.

Often times couples are attracted because they are opposites, but after spending a lot of time together one person wants to plan a vacation and the other simply wants to start driving (a judger vs. a perceiver). It's fun at first, when you are dating, but after your are married this can become quite annoying.

The secret to a good marriage and relationship is to know the personality of your partner and to accept it. Accepting their personality means not trying to change them.

A simple, free, online personality test:

<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes1.htm>

Exercises

The good, the bad, and the ugly...

Make a list of the things that you love about your partner and the things that you do not like or that annoy you about your partner:

The good – can your encourage these things?

The bad – things that annoy you about your partner, little quirky mannerisms

The ugly – can you live with these or might they be a deal breaker?

Now, share this list with your partner and discuss the results. If you really wanted to love your partner and give to them, you might think about doing more of the good things, less of the bad things, and none of the ugly things. Accommodation in relationships goes a long way and will help your relationship to thrive.

Personality Questions

Concerning your partner's behavior

- Is jealousy a part of our relationship?
- What is the definition of jealousy for each of you?
- What, specifically, makes you the most jealous?
- Are you sometimes embarrassed by your partner's behavior? What does he/she specifically do that embarrasses you?
- Could you change your embarrassing behavior if you wanted to do so? How could you do that?
- Is your partner critical about you and/or others? Could you change your critical nature and how could you do that, if yes?
- Is your partner pessimistic and/or negative?
- Is your partner controlling?

Partner's mood, temper

- When are some specific times when your partner's temper, stubbornness, and/or mood concerns you?
- What does your partner do that makes you become moody or what do they do that makes you seem to lose your temper?
- What did your family do to display temper and/or moodiness?
- Does your partner sometimes seem to go off by him/herself and want to be alone?
- Does your partner seem sad and unhappy at times? How often?
- Is your partner stubborn and does this bother you?

Personal habits

- What specific things does your partner do that annoys you?
- What could you do if you wanted to change the things that annoyed your partner?
- What happens if your partner's bad habits only get worse?
- Does your partner keep his/her word or is he/she trustworthy?
- Is your partner late or do they need to be right on time or do they need to be early? Does this annoy you?

Finances – Secret #4

This is the area where the most conflict arises and the area that is the most boring, so don't skip over it! Although this area is one of the most important, there are only a few areas on which you can focus that will make drastic improvements: a budget and goals.

The main secret of financial compatibility in a relationship is in simply talking about it. If you are hiding anything, and this is the area where people usually hid things, your relationship will most likely not succeed or, at least, it will not be as strong and close as it could be.

“To some people, money means power; to others, love. For some the topic is boorish, in bad taste. For others, it's more private than sex. Add family dynamics to the mix and for many you have the subject from hell.”

- Karen Peterson, columnist for *USA Today*, 1992.

Exercise 1

Write down where you are spending your money and how much

Make a budget by listing the following:

Current total income

Expenses

Housing

Loans/debt

Transportation costs

Food

Health care

Insurance

Contributions

Clothing

Household necessities

Other expenses

No subtract the expenses from the income. If there is a deficit, then some expenses need to be cut back.

For more help with this area, contact Crown Financial Ministries. They may have some financial counselors in your area and you may be able to visit and be advised by them for free.

<http://www.crown.org/MyCrown/InMyArea.asp>

Exercise 2

For this particular exercise, use the acronym SMART:

S – Specific – be as specific/detailed about your goal and what you want as possible

M – Measurable – formulate a way to measure your goal so that you can know if you have made progress

A – Attainable – it should be achievable

R – Realistic – make sure that your goal is realistic

T – Timed – a time frame to work out this goal and to complete it

1. Write down two short term financial goals you have with your partner.
2. Write down two long term financial goals you have with your partner.

Financial Questions

What were the spending habits of your family? What do you think is good about how they handled money and what do you think could have been better?

How much debt or unpaid bills do you have?

Who will have the main responsibility with the money or who will do what with the finances?

At what amount would one person need to talk with the other before spending?

The Money Motivation Test

Consumer Credit Counseling Service Mid America conducted this survey to ascertain a person's primary money motivation. After each statement, circle the answer that best describes you (only one). After scoring your answers, discuss the results with your partner to gain insights as to how your individual motivations regarding money impact your relationship.

1. Money is important because it allows me to...
 - a. do what I want to do.
 - b. feel secure.
 - c. get ahead in life.
 - d. buy things for others.
2. I feel that money...
 - a. frees up my time.
 - b. can solve some of my problems.
 - c. is a means to an end.
 - d. helps make relationships smoother.
3. When I make a major purchase, I...
 - a. go with what my intuition tells me.
 - b. research a great deal before buying.
 - c. feel I'm in charge – it's my/our money.
 - d. ask friends/family first.
4. If I have money left at the end of the month, I like to...
 - a. go out and have a good time.
 - b. put money into savings.
 - c. pay when I get to it, but don't hassle me.
 - d. worry that my credit suffers if I miss a payment.
5. When it comes to borrowing money, I...
 - a. simply won't/don't like to feel indebted.
 - b. borrow only as a last resort.
 - c. tend to borrow from banks/business sources.
 - d. ask friends/family because they know I'll repay.
6. When eating with our friends, I prefer to...
 - a. divide the bill proportionately.
 - b. ask for separate checks.
 - c. charge it to my bankcard and have others pay me.
 - d. pay the entire bill because I like to treat friends.
7. When it comes to tipping, I...
 - a. sometimes do and sometimes don't.
 - b. could probably be called Scrooge.
 - c. resent it but always tip the right amount.
 - d. tip generously because I like to be well thought of.
8. If I suddenly came into a lot of money, I...
 - a. wouldn't have to work.
 - b. wouldn't have to worry about the future.
 - c. could really build up my business.
 - d. would spend a lot on family and friends.
9. If unsure about a purchase, I may tell myself
 - a. it's only money.
 - b. it's a bargain.
 - c. it's a good investment.
 - d. he/she will love it.

Count the number of times you responded with an a, b, c, or d. Whichever letter you chose most frequently reveals your primary money motivation:

- a = freedom (freewheeler)
- b = security (hedger)
- c = power (driver)
- d = love (relater)

Source: *Couples & Money – Why Money Interferes With Love & What to Do About It* by Victoria Felton-Collins, Bantam Books and <http://marriagemate.com/exercises.html> - Luther Rice Seminary

Expectations – Secret #5

“I knew couples who’d been married almost forever – forty, fifty, sixty years. Seventy-two, in one case. They’d be tending each other’s illnesses, filling in each other’s faulty memories, dealing with the money troubles or the daughter’s suicide, or the grandson’s drug addiction. And I was beginning to suspect that it made no difference whether they’d married the right person. Finally, you’re just with who you’re with. You’ve signed on with her, put in a half century with her, grown to know her as well as you know yourself or even better, and she’s become the right person. Or the only person, might be more to the point. I wish someone had told me that earlier. I’d have hung on then; I swear I would.”

- Anne Tyler, "A Patchwork Planet"

Never go into marriage thinking you will change the other person.

Exercise 1

First, list as many things that you expect from your partner after you are married or things that would expect your partner to start doing now:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

15. _____

Second, go back through your list and mark a number from 1 to 5, after the expectation, that describes how important this expectation is to you. 1 being not so important and 5 being I cannot live without it. Put the number to the right of the number and lines and not on them.

Third, when you are done, fold the sheet in half (just after the number of importance and before the number of the expectation) so that your partner cannot see the number of importance you gave each expectation.

Fourth, exchange papers with your partner and have him/her make a number to the right of the expectation. The number will be from 1 to 5 with 1 being impossible to fulfill the expectation and 5 being no problem to fulfill the expectation.

After your partner is done, unfold the paper and discuss the results. You can now compare how important the expectation is to you and whether your partner will be able to fulfill it.

Unrealistic Expectations to Keep in Mind

1. Watch your standards.

I can remember dating girls and simply not being happy with what they had to offer. I did not realize that my requirements were an impossibility, no woman, or person for that matter, is perfect. My standards were too high and they prevented me from enjoying many wonderful girls who had a lot to offer. Often times our expectations stem from our families (mother, father, siblings) and marrying another person will add something completely different to the mix.

2. Expectations are important

Even fairly unrealistic expectations are important. Think and talk with your partner about why you might have them. Often times we simply want the feeling associated with something (we don't necessarily want a huge diamond or a red sports car, we simply want to feel loved/important and young. Can that feeling be given in a realistic way? Can you help your partner to feel loved, important, and attractive?

3. Expect realistic expectations

It is ok to expect some things, like your partner doing things for you that are achievable. Much of marriage is serving the other person and you would be amazed how much someone will do for you if you are doing things for them.

4. What can you do to fulfill your partner's expectations?

Often times it is not that we cannot fulfill expectations, it is that we won't or do not know them. If you do not have the time, make time. If you do not have ability, learn how to get the ability. In any relationship you have to step up to the plate and when both are doing this, the results are amazing.

5. Accept that you cannot have everything.

Your partner is not perfect and able to give you all your heart desires. Sometimes you marry a person knowing that they are not a talker and after marriage you are upset because they don't talk to you. You may need to come to grips that your partner is just the way he/she is and grieve. "When you really want something that is just not going to happen, you can either sulk, get angry, or do what every couple needs to do over the long term: grieve the losses that come with commitment." - University of Denver marriage experts Howard J. Markman, Ph.D., Scott M. Stanley, Ph.D., and psychologist Susan L. Blumberg, Ph.D., *Fighting for Your Marriage*.

6. When disappointed, ask why.

Often when we do not get what we want we just get angry and move on with our lives. When you are disappointed, ask yourself what you needed from that expectation. Knowing more about yourself will enable you to communicate what you need more efficiently to another person.

7. Watch comparisons

Do not look at other people or partners and think that you would be so much better off if you only had someone like that. Everyone has their problems and someone who seems perfect would become imperfect if you got to know them. "Love is the total absence of fear. Love asks no questions. Its natural state is one of extension and expansion, not comparison and measurement." - Gerald Jampolsky, an American psychiatrist.

8. Check your own self expectations

Each person is a unique individual and no two people are the same. Even twins are different. You should celebrate your individuality and you should check what you expect from yourself as far as your relationships go. Are they realistic? If you are not realistic with yourself, you probably won't be with others.

Adapted from Sari Harrar and Rita DeMaria, Ph.D. "The Seven Stages of Marriage."

Sexuality – Bonus information

Exercise 1

When you think about sexuality, write down in what you would be engaging if you were at a 1. Then think about what would be a 2 and so on until you come to a 5. The 5 would be the most sexual or sensual you could be with your partner. If this is emotional then put that down or if it is physical then put that down. The levels are entirely up to you and you should not show them to your partner until you have completed them.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Exercise 2

Now take the five levels of communication and these five levels of sexuality and compare them. Women usually desire a higher level of communication and men usually desire a higher level of sexuality. Ladies, if you are talking with your man on a higher level and not engaging in a higher level of sex then he may not feel satisfied. Men, if you are engaging in a higher level sexually with your woman and not engaging in a higher level of communication, she will feel used and cheap. You should be at a higher level sexually and conversationally.

Sexuality Questions

What is your partner's favorite form of affection? Do you have any problem providing this form on a regular basis? Does your partner provide the affection you need? Do the previous questions agree?

Do you worry that showing the needed affection will cause your partner to interpret it as sexual desire?

Did your family talk about sexual issues while you were growing up? If no, you probably won't discuss them with your partner either?

Do either of you use affection and/or sex as an advantage over the other person?

Shared Intimacy

Research tells us that the thing for which couples yearn, in their relationship, is INTIMACY.

There are moments of moving toward one another at certain times and places in our relationship that could be thought of as special experiences of intimacy.

Could each of you, separately, recall five such special moments in the past year (the time, place and setting of each) when you felt particularly close to your partner?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

No look at the intimacies on the next page and see if the five you have recalled fit any of the areas listed. If not, you have just created a new intimacy and may add it to the list.

Circle those areas that you think are already in your relationship intimacy repertoire.

Then list the intimacies that you would like to develop with your partner in the next six months.

Now compare notes with your partner.

It can be fun and challenging to work together on building a repertoire of intimacies!

Adapted from <http://marriagemate.com> and Luther Rice Seminary

Index of Sexual Satisfaction

Ask yourself each of the 8 points below about sexuality and then rate them to the right as to whether the answer would be highly satisfied, mostly satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or highly dissatisfied.

Circle the asterisk once for where you feel your answer would be and circle twice for where you think your partner would circle.

HIGHLY SATISFIED	MOSTLY SATISFIED	SOMEWHAT DISSATISFIED	HIGHLY DISSATISFIED
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1.	Our ability to openly discuss sexual intimacy	*	*	*	*
2.	Our way of initiating sexual intimacy	*	*	*	*
3.	Our frequency	*	*	*	*
4.	Our timing	*	*	*	*
5.	The setting and atmosphere	*	*	*	*
6.	Amount of love play	*	*	*	*
7.	Nature or variety of love play	*	*	*	*
8.	Overall satisfaction	*	*	*	*
	For yourself - total circled once	_____	_____	_____	_____
	For your partner - total circled twice	_____	_____	_____	_____

Adapted from <http://marriagemate.com> and Luther Rice Seminary