

Diligent Effort To Be Heard & Understood

By Cheri DeMoss

Think of the amount of diligent effort we put into getting our partners to see us. Whether they are a dysfunctional, alcoholic or personality disordered partner or just unaware - we try to get them to see who we are, understand what we feel. We endure behaviors that make us feel crazy.

We listen attentively to what they feel is wrong with us. We even make the suggested adjustments. We will push a mole hill up a mountain on only the hope that maybe we will be seen for who we are.

What is it that allows us to be treated in the ways we allow ourselves to be treated?

We were taught / trained. We were taught – directly or indirectly – to believe this is normal. Slowly over the years, by behaviors and role modeling, our belief system learned to accept this kind of behavior as normal. Most parents, unintentionally teach us to emotionally “dance” with them — they lead we follow. They demand that we make them emotionally comfortable and we do. They get angry and we change our behavior to keep them from getting angry again

They accuse us and we explain ourselves to deaf ears. They withdraw emotionally and again we change our behaviors, to keep them from withdrawing again. We try with *the diligent effort of a*



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child's belief in the “rightness” of their parent's teachings. And when it doesn't work we are convinced it is our fault.

Then we grow up and apply this same effort into our romantic relationships, often with the same results. What's missing?

Natural consequences. Being a child raised in this maze of mood-determined reactions completely eliminates any possibility of us allowing natural consequences from occurring. As children this causes us to live in a subtle (or not) state of constant stress and anxiety and the only thing that shifts is the level of fear in any given moment.

Want To End The Arguing But Not The Relationship?

No one teaches us how to have a relationship. Even when we're trying our best - we are guessing. We end up in relationships where we settle for less intimacy, closeness, & more arguing than we want.

Reactions towards & fear of our partner creates more & more distance. Both people usually feel that if their partner changed a few things the arguing would stop. When in reality they both need to understand

what's going on in the relationship & learn specific skills & behaviors that are relationship building instead of relationship destroying.

Our classes teach couples how to get understood; talk openly about reactions, patterns & fears; ask for what they want; listen without becoming afraid; and feel close again.

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Slowly over the years, by behaviors and role modeling our belief system learned to accept this kind of behavior as normal.

We're children & our emotional survival depends on our *feeling that we are likeable*. We don't have the emotional or mental ability to let natural consequences happen. We don't know how to refuse to emotionally “dance”. We don't understand it is not our place to make our parent feel special, give them attention, adjust to their moods or make them emotionally comfortable. We don't understand that it's our parent's job to make themselves emotionally comfortable.

So what happens when we grow up?

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By Cheri DeMoss

In places like a restaurant, movie line or gas station the unspoken "rule" is *First Come, First Served*. Which means the person who gets there first gets service first.

We've all had someone cut in front of a line of waiting patrons and experienced feeling irritated, frustrated, powerless until someone gets angry and yells at the person to get to the back of the line.

This same dynamic applies in all communication and is never more true than in a romantic relationship.

This is the most common relationship destroying behaviors couples do.

When you and your partner sit down to talk - *about anything*. The person who starts talking gets listened to and understood *FIRST*.

This needs to be an agreed upon relationship protocol between you and your partner.

If your partner starts sharing with you and you change the subject (subtly or not) to you, your feelings, thoughts or opinions you impact your partner exactly that same way as the guy cutting in front of the line at the movies.

You will cause your partner to feel frustrated, irritated, powerless, angry and completely unimportant.

Fixing Broken Relationships

How do we go about fixing relationships that are broken or on their way to being broken? What do you do when someone has hurt your feelings? Do you blame, hit, yell, cry, hide...tell on them?

The most effective approach is talking to the person who hurt you, in a way that tries to relate. When you try to connect act like you care about them, not like you're out to get them.

We may see the signs but not know what they mean or what to do.

Don't talk about how bad they are - tell them how they hurt you. Use a professional if you both get stuck.

Sometimes we see the warning signs, but we don't recognize them. And if we did we don't know what to do.

Relationship breakdown is caused by pain & fear that

hasn't been resolved. Listening carefully helps us communicate directly & honestly. We need to talk without attacking or blaming. Talk about the real issue...the real feeling - not how they're bad or wrong.

Share as clearly as possible what we think the real behaviors/issues to be; how we felt about what happened, & how it has affected the relationship.

Repairing a relationship also means owning your part in the pain & fear. Seldom is the breakdown all their fault.

Be caring & accountable. Without blame, you want to convey: This relationship is not disposable. I want to talk & see what repairs we can do. You matter to me.

Be honest with yourself. Are you open to looking at your own behaviors? Are you filled with blame? Is your goal to punish, to blame, to make them feel guilty? Are

you acting out your own anger at your past on them for the similar things they have

Fixing a relationship means owning your part in causing the pain & giving up the need to punish.

done?

If so, the repairing can't work, but instead will cause more damage. The most important things in fixing a relationship is attitude. We must feel in our heart:

"You are so important to me that I want to stop making you feel bad about who you are - I don't want to run from this relationship or from you. I want to look at my part in the hurt. I love you. I want to fix the damage."

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Checklist For Relationship Breakdown

This checklist will help you evaluate your relationship & see the signs for potential relationship breakdown. Catching early signs of a health problem can help prevent a catastrophe. The same is true with relationships. If you or your partner:

- Have shifted from predominantly wanting to understand your partner to wanting to be understood.
- Correct or try to prove your partner wrong more often than support and praise.
- There are fewer things to talk about
- There are more and more topics you work to avoid.
- Think about your side, your feelings, your reasons when you're partner is talking about your behavior.
- Used to want to tell your partner everything to talking about things that will not start an argument.
- Try to get your partner to change their behavior to make you emotionally comfortable rather than figuring out how to make yourself comfortable.
- Have tender, warm feelings about your partner when you are apart, yet when you're together you fight or argue.
- Instead of expressing affection in the tone of your voice, you express irritation or disdain.
- Think longingly about how the relationship used to be & how you used to feel.
- Don't feel like spending as much time making love or having sex at all.

Diligent Effort To Be Heard & Understood

We don't think, we replay.

We become attracted, then attached, then addicted to partners who are enough like our parent(s) to allow us to both recreate & replay the dance of our childhood. We do all the same things with the same desperate, but determined amount of effort that we tried when we were children. We dance their dance; giving attention on demand, adjusting our behaviors to avoid them getting angry, withdrawing, blaming or shaming us. We do the same things we did as children & get the same results now as adults.

As a child who's been busy balancing the fear, confusion & self blaming conviction that we aren't doing it right, it leaves no room for us to learn to develop the ability to think about what is actually happening. We were simply too young to be able to objectively look at how our parents were behaving. We believe what we are told & what we're told is what our parents meant. We are told, in a variety of ways, what our parents' intentions were – & they were ALWAYS good.

Our parents had good intentions while we had "bad behavior". Our behaviors were good or bad based on the emotional comfort of our parents.

What do we need to do to change the dance steps & start thinking & stop replaying?

Think, notice, & let the natural consequences happen.

In our adult relationships we have endless opportunities to begin to think about what is actually happening. To focus on seeing instead of being seen. To notice when our partners are trying to make us make them emotionally comfortable;

making unreasonable demands; using emotional blackmail; blaming us for their feelings & fears; or trying to make us feel bad about who we are or what we feel.

Once we are able to think about the behaviors of the other person & clearly see what they are actually doing. The next step is to let whatever is going to happen – happen.

We are not children anymore. Which means we can "white knuckle it" & face our fears of being disapproved of, disliked or judged & we will be fine.

What does this look like?

It looks like this. When our partners (or parents) are unreasonably – do nothing. Don't try to reason with or explain. Don't try to make them feel bad about their demands – simply go on with your day.

When they use emotional blackmail by withdrawing or

yelling – let them withdraw or yell. Do nothing. Don't try to reason with or engage them. Don't try to change their mind. Don't try to get even or make them feel bad about yelling or withdrawing so you don't have to feel the fear welling upside you – simply go on with your life.

When they become angry, blame you for their feelings & fears; or try to make you feel bad about who you are or what you feel - do nothing. Don't attempt to explain your intentions. Don't reason or explain your side to someone who isn't hearing you just so you don't have to feel scared & unlikable.

Just mentally step back & watch them. Notice they aren't hearing you any better today than they have in the past. Don't try to get even or make them feel bad. Simply look at what is in front of you – keep your eyes open & notice what is there & decide if it has always been there.

Think about what they're

doing, how they are doing it – now go on with your life. **Notice** your own level of fear of & belief in their declaration that you are bad & wrong.

Notice that they are looking to you to make them feel emotionally comfortable or better about themselves - just like your parents used to.

Notice that, just like your parents, they don't know how to take care of their feeling & fears & are looking to for you to do it for them by changing your actions, feelings, or level of self esteem. **Think** how they are asking you to do something that is unfair. You can't change yourselves to make another person emotionally comfortable without subtle but severe cost to your self esteem & internal happiness. You've tried. You tried frantically as a child & meticulously as an adult.

Understand that with all the effort in the world you cannot save someone from themselves & you should never have been asked to try.

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About Cheri DeMoss & Empowering Options

Cheri DeMoss is Founder and Director of **EMPOWERING OPTIONS®**, an organization specializing in personal empowerment. For the past 17 years Cheri has been teaching others how to turn obstacles into options. Cheri's warm, innovative approach focuses on how learned shame and dysfunctional beliefs from childhood dictate our behaviors as adults. She creates a shame-free, completely supportive and positive environment where you can easily understand and explore the behavior patterns and ideas that no longer serve you.

In addition to working with individuals, groups and couples **EMPOWERING OPTIONS®** offers seminars, workshops, CD's, newsletters, and uniquely effective classes for couples. Cheri provides a safe, encouraging environment for clients to understand how these patterns shape our experiences in relationships, work situations, and our own self-esteem. She provides information, validation, and ideas that make it easier to create the changes you want.

Cheri maintains a private practice, as well as designs, produces and presents **EMPOWERING OPTIONS® Empower By Example** seminar series. Cheri also provides in-service training for school districts, and customizes workshops, classes & training seminars for mental health professionals and local communities. She provides consultation for a wide variety of businesses and presents at national and state conferences. Cheri and her associates conduct a full time private practice in Chicago.

The more information, the easier it is to see the options in our lives. Raising our esteem helps us feel safe in the world and reach our goals. For more information about relationships, parenting, new ideas, behaviors and options go to www.EmpoweringOptions.com

Change For Me

By Cheri DeMoss

One of the most difficult things for us to let go of is the belief & expectation that our partner should change for us. We're taught a sense of entitlement. A feeling that they should change for us. Logically we know better. We say, "Everyone has a right to do what they want as long as they aren't hurting anyone."

But our actions in our relationships don't always support our words. Think about road rage. We become upset & angry because the guy in the other car isn't driving the way we think he should be. The

Remember, We have a deep belief that this is how it should be.

other driver is making us feel uncomfortable, threatened, anxious or scared. Once we feel scared we start thinking how he should be driving differently.

Notice that when we want the other person to change it's because we're feeling emotionally uncomfortable or scared.

We learn this belief from the adults who raised us. In fact, our parent's default belief was that children shouldn't make adults emotionally uncomfortable. They gave us the messages that we should take care of them. We should be quiet if they're uncomfortable with the amount of noise we're making. They

give us the message that our endless curiosity must stop when they're uncomfortable with our questions.

Grown ups demand & force us to change for them. They convince us we're wrong. Intimidate us with angry looks & words. They punish us, with-



draw from us & yell at us. All to make us change our behaviors, beliefs & feelings to make them comfortable. To make them feel safe.

Healthy parenting, which is guidance mixed with flexibility & a genuine desire to make children comfortable, not threatened, anxious or scared, is rare.

It's rare to find parents that role modeled taking-care-of-themselves behaviors. If we're making too much noise the parent moves to another room or explains to us (not yells) why we need to make noise outside. Most of us were raised with the opposite. Parents that role modeled not-taking-care of their own emotional needs but instead made us take care of those needs for them.

So the first thing we do in our adult relationships is try to make the other person change to make us emotionally safe & comfortable. *Remember, we have a deep belief that this is how it should be.* If our partner

wears an outfit that brings up feelings of embarrassment we believe it is fine & normal to tell them to change clothes rather than for us to work through our own feelings of being embarrassed. *We don't even realize that the feelings are ours – we're actually convinced that the other person is creating the feelings we are having.* Why do we start this relationship-damaging behavior?

Because we were made to change for those who loved us. Therefore we have learned that if our partner loves us they should change for us?

Whether we want to admit it or not there is a voice in our head that says: "People who make

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us uncomfortable, anxious, threaten or scare us should change for us."

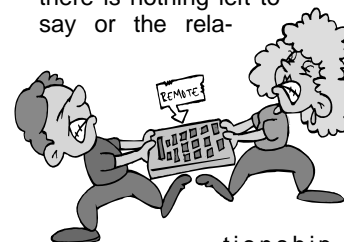
We think it, when we feel threatened by someone who is different from us. We actively do it with those closest to us. We've learned how to frighten, blame, shame, intimidate and force them into making us "comfortable".

But if you notice, it's never enough. There is always something else

they can do, stop doing, alter or change – it is never ending.

Why? Because those feelings of fear, anxiety, jealous, insecurity – all of them that live inside of us are going unaddressed. We don't know how to work out those feelings on our own. We were taught that those around us should make the feelings go away by changing.

Couples will try to force each other to change until there is nothing left to say or the rela-



tionship ends.

Couples will end a loving, caring relationship because the fear inside feels so big and they can't get their partner to change enough to make the fear stop. More often, instead of buckling down to work out the uncomfortable scary feelings inside of us, we continue to try to make those we love change for us. Struggling over the smallest things. Struggling to "win". Struggling to stop the feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and fear – all at the cost of destroying healthy relationships with those we love and who love us.

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