
RELATIONSHIP RESCUE

A Seven-Step Strategy for
Reconnecting with Your Partner

Phillip C. McGraw, Ph.D.



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*R*ELATIONSHIP
RESCUE

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for Reconnecting with
Your Partner**

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 HYPERION

New York

Visit Dr. McGraw's websites at:
www.philmcgraw.com
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Names and identifying characteristics of people in the book have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

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*This book is dedicated with love and gratitude
to my wife, Robin,
who never stopped being a wife even though she became a mother,*

*to my sons,
Jay and Jordan,
who continue to inspire me to want to “do it right,”*

*and in loving memory of my father,
“Dr. Joe” (alias the “old man”),
a man of deep passion and emotion who overcame huge odds to
positively impact so very many.*

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*R*ELATIONSHIP
RESCUE

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prologue

GET REAL: RECONNECTING WITH YOUR CORE

If your relationship is in trouble, big trouble or small, I'm going to tell you straight-up how to fix it. I'm not going to try to be cute or glib, and I'm not going to hit you with a lot of clever buzzwords. I'm not going to use a bunch of psychobabble or the *en vogue* theory *du jour*. I'm going to give you the straightforward, no-nonsense answers that work—answers that have always worked, but have just been buried in a deluge of pop-psych nonsense.

But there is a serious and outcome-determinative precondition that you have to meet if you expect to successfully rescue your relationship and reconnect with your partner. *You* have to get real about *you*. And when I say real, I mean one hundred percent, drop-dead, no-kidding real. No defensiveness, no denial—total honesty. Get argumentative, be rigid, be defensive and hardheaded, and you will lose for sure. While the focus of this book is rescuing your relationship and reconnecting with your partner, the vehicle to achieving that is you. Not you and your partner, but you. Reconnecting with your partner cannot and will not happen if you do not reconnect with yourself first.

I promise you, you can change your partner from daylight to dark, you can dump your partner and trade up to a better one, but it won't make a damn bit of difference unless and until you decide to clean house inside yourself first. This journey does not begin with you and your partner; it begins with you. You have to take your power back and become the kind of person who commands quality, inspires respect, and settles for nothing less than an active and abiding love. That change begins from the inside

out as you get back in touch with who you are and as you decide what to do with your love, your life, and your vision. Your clarity and your purpose must become crystal clear. The fix, the rescue, depends on you. To proceed with any other mind-set is to guarantee failure, miserable failure. That's why I have to begin by getting you right with you. I know you aren't being true and right with yourself, or you wouldn't be in relationship trouble and you wouldn't be holding this book.

In fact, if you are in a relationship that has gone awry, a relationship that is laced with pain, confusion, or emptiness, then by definition I know you have lost touch with your own personal power, your own dignity, your own standards, and your own self-esteem. You've allowed yourself to accommodate pain and disappointment and self-destructive attitudes. You have rationalized away many of your hopes and dreams, you've settled for so many things you did not want, you've allowed apathy to set in, and along the way you've probably let your partner mistreat you over the years. But most important, you've mistreated yourself. You've blamed your partner or other circumstances for your place in life rather than making the effort to find the true answers within you. You've lost touch with that part of you that I call your core of consciousness—that place where you are absolutely defined, the place within you where your greatest strengths, instincts, values, talents, and wisdom are centered. Think back; there was a time and a place when you knew who you were and knew what you wanted. You believed in yourself, and your life was full of hope and optimism. You were in touch with your core of consciousness. You were centered on this God-given core that uniquely defined you. And you can be centered on this core again.

This is not silly self-help talk. This may well be the most important concept you'll ever seek to master. I've studied successful people my entire life. I always wondered why these people create wonderful, rewarding relationships and lives when others just as talented muddle through with mediocrity. We all know people who get all the breaks and opportunities, yet who still can't do anything with their lives. And we know others who seemingly come out of nowhere to defy the odds and overcome immense challenges to carve their niche in the world. What I've discovered with stark and undeniable clarity is that the ones who do well are so in touch with their individual core of consciousness, so aware of their self-worth and their sense of personal value, that they not only treat themselves with enormous self-respect but they inspire others to treat them with equal respect. They live with an empowering inner clarity, one that gives them the unshakable confidence that they and they alone can determine the

quality of their life. They have tapped into their core of consciousness, claimed their right to a fulfilling life, and have refused to accept less from themselves or anyone else.

The truth is not always easy to hear, but it always remains the truth—and I'm not going to let you hide from it and, in so doing, cheat yourself. So listen to me: if you don't scrape away all of life's layers of distortion, negative input, and doubt-inducing messages, and get back in touch with your own core of consciousness, then no matter what else you learn, you will have such low standards that you will continue sabotaging your relationship. You will remain mired in pain, guilt, anger, and confusion. You can bet on it.

That's why I'm coming after you first. You must reclaim your own power and strength so that you can build something extraordinary for yourself. The power I'm talking about is not the kind of power that will make you more domineering over your partner. It will not give you more control over your partner; nor will it allow you to win more arguments.

This is not about power to take things from people so that you have more for yourself. It's about the power to give and to lift up those around you. What I'm talking about is the power that comes from depth and conviction—the power to inspire, the power to create, the power to experience your life and relationship at a totally different level. It is the quiet, calm power of dignity and worth. When you tap into your own core of consciousness, and you start creating your own experience, you will notice that the world, including your partner, will start to relate to you differently. As Emerson once wrote, “What lies behind us and what lies in front of us pales in comparison to what lies within us.”

So that is your precondition. As you go forward into this book, you must contemplate everything that's presented with an eye toward how it can get you back in touch with yourself—how it can get you back to that core of strength that has been there since you were born. As you read, think about how you will put honor and nobility back into your heart and mind so that you can begin to engage the world from a position of strength instead of weakness. Commit right now to requiring more of yourself, for yourself, in every area of your life. With every page you read, I want your head to lift, I want your chin and your chest to come out, not as an act of arrogance but as a message of determination. Tapping into your core of consciousness, rediscovering your inner strength and drive for greatness, can be the single most significant act of your life, and your greatest gift to your relationship partner.

IT'S YOUR TIME; IT'S YOUR TURN

It has been fifteen years since I sat with Carol and Larry in my psychology office. They were a pretty typical couple—typical because they were having relationship problems. Like so many other couples, they were once absolutely certain that their deep love and optimism would make their relationship last. They had come together because they wanted to, because the idea of a life together felt so right, because they believed their union was the one thing that would complete them. They approached their relationship seriously, made sacrifices, and promised they would offer up their hearts and souls to each other.

And now here they were, trying to understand why the very thing that they once thought would make them so happy had left them feeling trapped, overwhelmed by an unspeakable feeling of disappointment. They were hurting, second-guessing themselves, wondering how something could go stagnant and painful so quickly. Carol swallowed, touching her throat with her fingers as tears slid down her cheeks. Larry stared out the window, his shoulders sagging, his chin propped on his fingers. Their relationship had become defined by a quiet desperation, punctuated by angry silences, which alternated with animated attacks on each other's character—and in a last-ditch effort they had dutifully sought out professional help. "I am so tired of feeling alone," Carol told me. "I feel like I want to scream or hit something, but I don't know what and I don't know why. We used to be so fresh and so alive—and now our love has become cold and bitter and lifeless. Is this it, is this all there is?"

I started talking, giving Larry and Carol the same platitudes, the same

conventional wisdom, that I and every other therapist in the country had been doling out for years. You're going to have to commit to solving your problems, I said. You need to communicate better, see things through your partner's eyes, try to resolve each and every one of your differences, remember your marriage vows. Just as I had been taught, I was acting warm and genuine as I trotted out all the usual responses. But suddenly all I could hear myself saying was blah, blah, blah. Blah, blah, blah, blah. As I sat there, I asked myself, "Has anybody noticed over the last fifty years that this crap doesn't work? Has it occurred to anyone that the vast majority of these couples aren't getting any better?"

Here were these two people, searching for answers, and I realized I was telling them things about "the nature of relationships" that weren't going to make a damn bit of difference. My profession's advice was all well and good if life was an ivory tower or if our clients lived in some sitcom-like Ozzie and Harriet existence. But it did little for those relating in the real world with real problems, real children, real financial demands, real competition for affection, real stress. The vast majority of relationship advice offered in our society not only did not work, it didn't even come close to working. That was true then and it is true now. Research shows that over two-thirds of couples, married or otherwise, who attend relationship counseling are worse or at least no better after one year. The divorce rate in America refuses to drop below fifty percent, and twenty percent of us will divorce not once but twice in our lifetime. Clearly, pleasant and generic instructions on how to "communicate" better or theoretical musings that give you great "insights" about relationships just weren't going to cut it fifteen years ago and won't cut it now.

That day with Carol and Larry was a turning point in my life. I decided that if I continued imparting the conventional wisdom, I would be cheating them and everyone like them out of any chance they had to turn their relationship around. I resolved right then and there that I was going to get real about why relationships were failing in America and what needed to be done to turn the tide. People needed a solid, practical way to reframe their lives and their lifestyles in order to create a healthy relationship rather than live in such a way as to maintain and support a bad one. It didn't matter that I had more degrees than a thermometer. I decided that I was going to have to be willing to get my hands dirty in the ugly side of life, stop dispensing easy advice, and meet the Carols and Larrys of the world where they were in their lives as well as in their relationships.

That's what this book is all about. I'm going to tell you what I believe

is the truth about what you have to do to meet your needs and the needs of your partner, and exactly how to rebuild the foundation of your life so that you can have a fulfilling relationship.

What I am going to tell you will not have a thing to do with textbook communication theories like “active listening” or “relating with empathy.” I’m not going to cry with you, and I’m not going to gently hold your hand. I’m not going to try to make you and your partner feel better by having you write mushy love letters to one another and then put roses on your pillows at the end of the night. If you are looking for something to read that will act like a quick salve on your emotional wounds, then I recommend you give this book to someone else—because I want to shake you back to your very core, to wake you up, and then help you start designing a memorable life and a memorable relationship.

I admit, I am pretty much an in-your-face, tell-it-like-it-is sort of person. And I want you to know that this book is not going to make things easy for you. This book is designed as a clarion call—an unapologetic command that you strip away all your defenses and fears, that you break through the clutter of your past, that you raise your standards of personal excellence, and that you stay diligently on course so that you may get what you want in your life. My mission is to help peel away the layers of confusion and distorted thinking that have dominated your relationship, peel away the false world you have constructed, put you back in touch with your inner core of consciousness, and help you find the answers that work.

And I recognize that means that a whole lot of you need a lot of answers. Relationships in general, and marriages and families in particular, continue to disintegrate before our eyes. Families are losing their focus, and domestic violence, abuse, and emotional dysfunctions have gone vertical. The epidemic is like a train careening at an ever-increasing speed down a steep hill—and if you’re reading this book, that means you, too, are probably on that train and could very well be barreling toward disaster.

I know you had no intention of getting on this train. All you wanted to do was love somebody and be loved right back. You believed a relationship was the one thing that would complete you. You weren’t an idiot, you weren’t some masochist who looked for a relationship so that you could suffer, and you sure weren’t lazy. Nonetheless, here you are. And we both know that no matter how much willpower you have to keep hanging in there, there is a line out there that, if pushed across, you will say, “That’s enough, I won’t take this another minute.” You know yourself well enough

to realize that if you cross that line, it will be the beginning of the end. You know your dignity and your heart can take only so much, and if it is violated one too many times, then you will finally dig your heels in and this deal will be over in a flash.

That line may still be looming way out in your future somewhere, or at this very moment you might be walking that line like a tightrope. But I'm here to tell you that I want to keep you from crossing that line. You may not know how or why your relationship got into such a mess, but I do know. I know what you're going through, and I know how it all happened to you. What I'm about to say may sound arrogant, and if it does, I am sorry for being so blunt. But after having been to hell and back with thousands of couples in a variety of settings, I've gotten street smart. I know how to get your relationship under control and back on the right track. And if you stay with me through this book, I'll show you what you've been missing, and I'll lead you to clear answers, starting with this one: you are not inadequate or incompetent when it comes to a relationship. The brutal and sad fact is that the deck has been stacked overwhelmingly against you.

. IT'S A WONDER YOU'VE .
MADE IT THIS FAR

If you know anything about me through my recent writings or my television work, then you know I am the last person on earth ever to tell you that you are a victim or that there is somewhere besides yourself to look to as the cause of this or any other situation that now defines your life. But the very society that has taught you that it is good and right and natural to share your life with another person, the same society that in large part defines and measures success by how you manage your relationships and your family, never bothered to teach you how you are supposed to do that.

Think about it: the requirements for a driver's license are tenfold the requirements for a marriage license—to drive, you at least have to take a test to demonstrate some level of knowledge and competency before you are turned loose. Yet our collective society is willing to turn you loose with someone else's life for two bucks and a signature down at the courthouse. You probably got your only lessons about being in a relationship by watching your parents. The problem with that is they no doubt had less instruc-

tion and knew less about relationships than you do. You went to school and learned how to read and write, add and subtract, but you never went to a class that taught you how to understand your emotions. At no time did you ever receive any systematic education about what to expect in a relationship or how to behave in one. No one ever taught you how to relate. No one ever taught you how to select a good mate. No one ever taught you how to be a husband or a wife. And no one ever taught you what to do when things went wrong. If you think about it, no one even taught you how to define what “wrong” was.

As a result, you probably chose your mate for the wrong reasons and then proceeded into your relationship with ill-defined skills, goals, and expectations. And then came the double whammy: when you went looking for help, most of those in the “helping professions,” with their textbook therapies and psychological theories, seemed to have absolutely no understanding of how to help you. It is amazing to me how this country is overflowing with marital therapists, psychiatrists and psychologists, counselors, healers, advice columnists, and self-help authors—and their approach to relationships is usually so embarrassing that I want to turn my head in shame.

It’s time for the double-talk and fuzzy thinking to stop. In this journey, the one through the pages of this book, you won’t be relying on theory and bad information. You will be relying on techniques and realities for creating and managing a healthy relationship. Instead of resorting to another round of expensive therapy or reading some warm and fuzzy euphemisms that could very well keep you from doing those things that can genuinely help you, you’re going to learn the truth—and the truth is that your relationship is in trouble because *you* set it up that way.

Read that sentence again: your relationship is in trouble because *you* set it up that way. And let me be real clear, I’m not saying that you set it up that way because you were in a bad mood once in a while. You didn’t set it up that way because of something really outrageous that you did one time five months or five years ago. You set it up that way by actively, consistently, and efficiently designing, programming, and choreographing your entire lifestyle to generate and then support a bad relationship. You have chosen to live in a way in which no other result could occur.

I will say this over and over before you finish this book: it is not possible for you to have a seriously defective long-term relationship unless you have generated and adopted a lifestyle to sustain it. Every single person in every walk of life has a lifestyle that supports who and what he or she is. If

you are a healthy, vibrant, efficient, and productive person who is in touch with your core of consciousness, then I know without question that you have a lifestyle that supports that manner of living. If you are an emotionally pained and relationally troubled person who has lost touch with your core of consciousness, I know that you have a lifestyle that supports that too. You cannot have a bad relationship unless your lifestyle is characterized by stress, pressure, distraction, and a harried and chaotic existence. Moreover, if you are living in a dysfunctional relationship with another person, it's because you have a dysfunctional relationship with yourself.

I'm not blaming you; I'm just telling you how it is. A bad relationship cannot exist if it is not fed and nurtured in some way. If you think I am wrong, just look out your window. If you see weeds in your yard or in the field next door, they didn't just happen. Some way, somehow that weed had to get started. And what's more, it had to be fed and nurtured in some way. It didn't grow in concrete; somehow the environment had to support its very existence or it could not be.

I'm not saying you necessarily chose any environment or lifestyle consciously, and I'm not saying that you generated your dysfunctional relationship on purpose. But I'm telling you that the reality of your relationship along with your overall lifestyle and your relationship with yourself are one hundred percent inextricably intertwined. If you have not designed and carried out your life to create or allow distance instead of intimacy, combativeness instead of cooperation, blame and rejection instead of accountability and acceptance, you cannot maintain the erosion and pain that you are now experiencing. Problems don't flourish in isolation. They have to have help and nurturance.

As an example, simply compare the lifestyle of someone who is chronically and morbidly overweight with the lifestyle of someone who is fit, energetic, and of normal weight. I will promise you that both of these people have designed their worlds to sustain what they have become. The overweight person will use food differently. You will find that he or she lives to eat, while a person of normal weight eats to live. This is a painful truth, but it is the truth. When it comes to your relationship, you have chosen to live patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior that have generated something that is not giving you what you want. You are living to suffer instead of loving to live. That has to change, and it has to change first before anything else will begin to fall into place.

I have no doubt that many of you at this very moment are saying, "Wait a second, Dr. Phil. All your talk about getting me straight is just

great, but you have no idea what a jerk my partner can be. You have no idea what manner of hell my partner brings into my life. I'm fine about making my life better, but what about my partner? Why all this total focus on me? I'm just one-half of this deal!"

Trust me, I do know what you may well be living with, and I promise you, your partner will get his or her turn in the barrel. But in all likelihood, your partner isn't sitting right beside you reading this book. You're the only one reading it. My only input, my only influence, is with you, so that is who I am focusing on, and if you are smart you will do the same. But I do know it takes two to tango, and if you are able to change yourself, if you are able to create a different lifestyle and environment in which your relationship takes place, if you are able to regain your own power and reclaim your right to dignity and respect, then your partner is going to be seriously affected.

You can't control your partner. You can't make changes for your partner. You can't tell your partner what to do. But you can inspire your partner. You can give your partner a whole new set of behaviors and new set of stimuli to respond to. If you drop out of the destructive mind-set and vicious circle of mutually frustrating interactions that are causing your relationship to implode, if you drop out of the fight and start living a new way, it's going to be real difficult for your partner to continue spewing and seeking venom. You can stop sabotaging yourself and your relationship, and you can start inspiring the kind of reactions you want from your partner. In the face of such constructive input, he or she can't fight alone, argue alone, or continue to be offended. Your partner can pout for a while, perhaps withdraw and be suspicious for a while, but eventually he or she is going to feel pretty stupid sitting over in the corner while you seem to be getting so very much happier and so much more optimistic and at peace with yourself.

. RESCUING YOUR RELATIONSHIP . MEANS RESCUING YOU

Besides, what's the alternative—to allow your current lifestyle to persist, a lifestyle that with each passing day broadens the gap between you and your hopes and dreams? This isn't brain-surgery or quantum physics here—what you are doing, how you are living, is not working. Plain and simple, it is not working. If you do not push yourself to find out what it is

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