

A photograph of a person climbing a steep, rocky mountain peak. A long, narrow staircase is built into the slope, leading up to the summit. The sky is overcast and grey. The text "Creating a Transformational Life and Long-Term Marriage" is overlaid in white.

Creating a Transformational Life and Long-Term Marriage



After getting the foundational pieces in place, you are in a better position to work towards the long-term goals you have for your relationship and life that you each want.

Using the tools and strategies from previous modules, you can put the stepping stones in place to take you to the ultimate destination. These exercises are designed to help you create and execute a plan to get you there and develop an even deeper bond with one another.

Introduction

WHERE IS THE RELATIONSHIP?

As you are developing your plan, the first step is to think about where you currently are in the relationship. **Do this without any judgment.** Don't feel bad about or be hard on yourself because of where you currently are – it will just serve as a starting point. Then you can more clearly identify the steps necessary to create the life and marriage that you want.

If your goal for your relationship is for it to be thriving, that will look differently for both you and your partner. Everybody has a different definition of that word and vision for what they want in the relationship.

Simply consider the state of the relationship and then we'll focus on getting you to the next step. As you create your ideal relationship in your mind, it's important to put that out there as an "aim" goal, then *focus on the immediate steps in front of you* which eventually lead to its achievement.

It's important that you maintain focus on the steps in front of you so you know the concrete steps and actions you need to be spending your energy on, instead of focusing on the gap that's currently between you and your goal, which can lead to feeling overwhelmed.

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO?

Now that you've considered where things are in the relationship currently, it's important to create a vision of what you want it to look like in the future. This gives you an "aim" goal – a direction to move towards regarding the overall quality of the relationship.

If your goal is to be on the thriving level in the relationship, you must clearly define what that looks like for you and how you will know once you are there. If you are having trouble creating a vision for your relationship, ask yourself what it would look like if you woke up tomorrow and everything was exactly the way you wanted it to be mentally, spiritually, physically, emotionally, etc.

Here are some questions to consider as you're thinking about this, and feel free to include any other questions as a part of your definition of a "thriving" relationship:

How would you:

- interact with each other?
- spend your time together?
- feel in one another's presence?
- talk about problems or disagreements?
- communicate generally with each other?
- show respect and care for the other person?
- talk together and repair the relationship if the negative cycle pulled you away from each other?
- work together to support the household and the logistical aspects of your lives?
- describe your sexual relationship in a thriving marriage?
- successfully parent together?
- come together around triggers?

Example:

1. *How would we feel in one another's presence? I would feel excited to see you and fully committed to making you happy and being there for you. I'd have a deep sense of happiness and satisfaction spending time and laughing together. We'd both serve and support each other and could turn to each other in moments of need to give and receive support.*

2. *How would we communicate together? We would interrupt our negative cycle each time we noticed things starting to spin up, and we'd share how we felt about the situation. I'd be there to validate and be compassionate to you when you needed to be heard, and you'd be there to listen and support me. We'd let each other finish their thoughts before interjecting our own.*

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

Continue on separate sheet of paper if necessary

REVERSE ENGINEER YOUR VISION

After mapping out the vision you want for your relationship, now reverse engineer each aspect of the vision you created and identify the building blocks to making that a reality. What specific actions must be in place to build the stepping stone to create that aspect of your vision?

And secondly, what skills, perspective, attitude, approach do you need to implement or learn in order to execute on that action / stepping stone? Write your answers below as you refer to the previous worksheet for each section:

Example:

1. In order to feel excited, I need to feel safe. To create safety, the skills we must implement are being able to connect emotionally, control our emotions and words, and be open and willing to talk about difficult things. To have satisfaction laughing and spending time together, I need to understand and feel like you care about my pain and are willing to be there to support me when I need to turn to you. To feel supported, I need to have open communication and for us to tell one another when we need something from each other.

2. To interrupt our negative cycle, we need to check in emotionally with ourselves daily and get into the habit of sharing on that level outside of the moments we get stuck. In order to validate and be understanding, I need us to share vulnerably instead of attacking or defending in the pattern, and I need to know that you want to hear how I'm doing. Letting each of us finish our thoughts will require me to remember patience and I'll need your patience as I'm trying to learn this new skill.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

*** Share all of your answers with your partner*

MAKE A PLAN & TAKE ACTION

You've identified the kind of relationship that you want, what it specifically looks like in multiple areas, and you've clarified what needs to happen in order to create the building blocks that lead to the goal. Now, the next step is to make the decision to take action and follow through on that decision!

It's best if you choose one area of the relationship that you want to improve and focus on that for a bit of time. You can make more headway when you focus on one or two things instead of everything all at once. Feel free to come together and decide what areas you'd like to focus on and then spend your time either learning the skills and approach necessary to execute on what needs to be done, or you can just implement the tools you have to build those stepping stones, the ingredients that make up the overall goal.

Give yourselves time and be patient as you're each working to improve.

So make a plan, work together, then appreciate and celebrate the progress that you make! Reevaluate as you go and make the tweaks necessary to be successful.

ASKING FOR NEEDS TO BE MET

Dr. John Gottman, a renowned couples researcher, taught that the key factor that defines a healthy couple from a couple that struggles is their ability to come back together after moments of disconnection.

The goal isn't to avoid getting disconnected. That's not even possible. Rather, both people should focus on developing the ability to interrupt the negative cycle by sharing how they feel, then asking for what they need, which helps you to feel grounded again. This is the skill that will revitalize and strengthen your marriage more than any other.

To create your vision of your ideal relationship, you have to work together and get support, comfort, and reassurance from one another to feel fulfilled and ultimately reach your long-term goals for your relationship.

The following exercises are the next tools to integrate after you've interrupted your cycle and have shared how you feel – you ask for your need to be met. This can only be done when there is enough safety and security in the relationship, which creates the confidence that you need to ask and know that your partner is going to be there for you most of the time.

If you don't feel like you have that confidence yet, start by continuing to step out of the cycle by noticing when you're getting stuck and sharing how you feel. The more your partner responds empathetically and compassionately to your sharing, the more confident you'll feel about asking for what you need in the moment.