

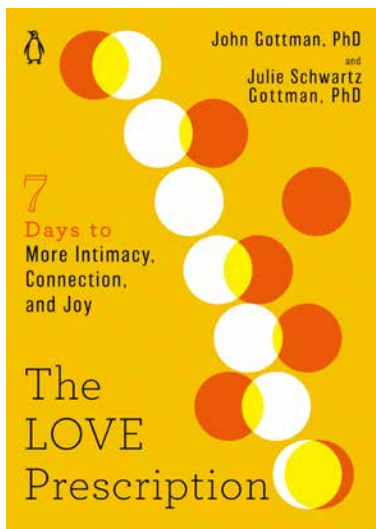


7 Habits

OF HAPPY MARRIAGES

forBetter[®]

The Love Prescription



DR. JOHN GOTTMAN AND DR. JULIE SCHWARTZ GOTTMAN ARE THE WORLD'S LEADING RELATIONSHIP SCIENTISTS. They founded the Love Lab at the University of Washington in 1990. Their goal: to identify the building blocks of love. They wanted to know: What makes love last? Why does one couple stay together forever, while another falls apart? And was it even possible to quantify any of this using the tools of science and mathematical modeling to predict whether a couple would live happily ever after?

It turns out love is much more than a feeling. It's an action. *Love is the small things you do often that have the greatest compounding positive impact on your relationship.*

In The Love Prescription, the Gottman's have taken a tiny slice of their life's work and isolated their most foundational findings to create a bit-sized action plan of their best, most distilled, and potent advice to bring more intimacy, connection, and joy into your relationship.

Here we distill the seven relationship-building habits that are fun, easy, actionable, and immediately beneficial.

DAY 1

MAKE CONTACT

How couples react to their partner's "bids for connection" is the single biggest predictor of happiness and relationship stability.

There's a massive misconception for many that for connection to be meaningful, you must give hours of time to it. Not true. We have opportunities for meaningful connection constantly—but we too often miss them—or we don't realize how important these seemingly small, fleeting, insignificant "bids for connection" can be.

What is a bid for connection? It's an invitation to connect. It can look like a casual remark. It can be as subtle as a sigh.

How people react to their partner's bids for connection is the biggest predictor of happiness and relationship stability. These fleeting little micro-moments of positivity and connection spell the difference between happiness and unhappiness, between lasting love and divorce.

Partners respond to bids for connection in one of three ways:

1. By *turning toward* (positive connection): They give a positive or affirmative response, acknowledging the other person and engaging with their attempt to connect.
2. By *turning away* (negative interaction): They give no response, either actively ignoring or just not noticing their partner's attempt to connect.
3. By *turning against* (toxic behavior): They respond irritably or angrily to actively shut down their partner's attempt to connect.

WHAT DO BIDS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

Your partner, scrolling on their phone, remarks:

- Partner: "Oh wow, what an interesting story." (Bid for connection)
- You look up and say: "Oh yeah? What's it about?" (Turning toward)
- OR...You remain silent and ignore the comment completely. (Turning away)
- OR...You say: "Don't interrupt me, I'm trying to work!" (Turning against)



You're sitting quietly at dinner:

- You give a deep audible sigh. (Bid for connection)
- Your partner says: "Hey, honey, you sound exhausted." (Turning toward)
- OR...Your partner says nothing and keeps watching the nightly news. (Turning away)
- OR...Your partner says: "What's that about? What's wrong now?" (Turning against)

Be on the lookout for small bids of connection that you can engage with, turning toward your partner even if it's just briefly.

These bids, or invitations to connect, come in many forms:

- Eye contact, a smile, a sigh
- A direct ask for your help or attention
- Saying good night or good morning
- Asking for a favor
- Reading something aloud to you: "Hey, listen to this..."
- Pointing something out: "Look at that!"
- Seeming sad, frustrated, exhausted

TODAY'S PRACTICE

1. Make frequent bids for connection.
2. Turn toward each and every bid.



DAY 2

ASK A BIG QUESTION

Knowing and being known is a lifelong project of learning who your partner is and how they may change over time.

Step one of connecting with someone else is knowing who someone is, and being known by them. Being a team is great, but we have to remember that we're still two individuals, growing, changing, and evolving over time.

The Gottman's recommend each partner *create a "love map" by gaining an intimate knowledge of your partner's inner world.* What are their hopes, dreams, beliefs, fears, desires? These discoveries are made by asking open-ending questions. Big questions where there's no yes/no reply that's possible.

A big question doesn't have to be serious or momentous—although it can be!

Consider these:

- What's on your heart and mind today?
- What's your biggest concern for each of our kids right now?
- What's your all-time favorite movie?
- If you could live any decade of your life over which would it be, and why?
- If you could magically have any skill or talent, what would you choose, and why?
- If you could own a vacation property where would it be, and why?
- If you could be a superstar athlete in any sport what would you choose?

Making love maps is about listening, learning something new about the person you love, being surprised. It needs to be a daily habit, not a "special occasion" thing. Mapping should never be finished. It's a lifelong project of learning who your partner is and how they may change over time. Stay curious. Start exploring today!



TODAY'S PRACTICE

1. Ask open-ended questions.
2. Be curious. Listen. Dig deeper.

DAY 3

SAY THANK YOU

A thriving relationship requires a culture of appreciation between partners—looking for what’s being done right and verbalizing your gratitude.

Everyone wants to be seen by their partner. To be noticed, acknowledged, and appreciated. The Gottman’s found that unhappily married couples miss most of the positive things the other partner did. It wasn’t that the happily married couples were doing sweeter more helpful things, but they were simply better at seeing their partner doing them.

Psychologist Robert Weiss coined the term “negative sentiment override” to describe what happens when negative feelings about a relationship become so strong and habitual that they negatively color the positive moments that are actually happening right before you. You focus on the negative, and miss the positive.

When people are locked into scanning their world for the negative, it affects all of the brain’s processing, shaping what you perceive, what you pay attention to, and how you feel—it’s shaping your life experience.

However, when you’re spending your time scanning for the positive, looking for what’s right instead of what’s wrong, you change your brain’s functionality. You create new pathways, activate new synapses, effectively “rewire” your neural circuitry (i.e. neuroplasticity). You train your brain to perceive the world differently, without that negative lens. It’s good for your brain, your body, and your relationship.

A thriving relationship requires a thriving culture of appreciation between partners. The more we can

interact in a positive way the easier it will be to get through, and even flourish, amid challenging times. Start today. Find the good that’s been hidden and overlooked, no matter how small or routine, notice it, and appreciate it—telling your partner why this small thing is a big deal to you.



TODAY'S PRACTICE

1. Watch your partner closely.
2. Observe everything they do right.
3. Express your appreciation.

DAY 4

GIVE A REAL COMPLIMENT

Admiration is about valuing your partner for who they are (not what they do)—it's about their innate and wonderful qualities.

Couples who stay happily together are easily able to name specific qualities they love and appreciate about their partner. They have vivid memories of their past together. When they describe their shared history together, their narrative is an overwhelmingly positive one—they emphasize the good times and the upsides.

Couples who take the time every day to notice and hold in mind what they admire about the person they've chosen to weather the storms of life with are the ones who succeed long term. Admiration isn't something that just happens—it's something you do. Actively admiring the other person—appreciating them not just for what they do, but for who they are.

Each of us is our own unique bundle of good qualities and...well, not so good qualities. The masters of love are great at seeing their partner's innate good qualities. They are highly skilled at holding—in the front of their minds—what they admire about their chosen person.

Recall the moment you decided that you wanted to be together long term and make a life together.

- What were the qualities that drew you to your partner initially?
- What excited you about this person?
- What did you admire about them?

In your typical, everyday life, as you and your partner are going about your business—cooking meals, negotiating chores, parenting your kids, chatting

about your day—you'll need, at minimum, twenty positive interactions for each negative one to build a healthy balance in your emotional bank account.

The difference between extremely unhappy couples and the very happy couples boiled down to one simple thing: *the happy couples were kinder when they spoke to each other*—they treated each other more gently, without criticism, contempt, or sarcasm.

When you look at your partner today, and every day, you can focus on their flaws, or you can focus on the qualities that make them indispensable to you, wonderful to you, attractive to you. It's a choice. It's an active thing you do to fan the flames of long-term love.

A daily micro-habit of reminding yourself of one specific reason you love and admire your partner will take you miles in terms of a lifetime of love. Part of admiration is cherishing what you have with this person, amplifying their positive qualities in your mind and minimizing the negative ones. Reflect on what you cherish about your partner—then share it with them.

Affection, respect, and friendship are the foundation of everything else in a marriage.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

1. Reflect on the qualities you cherish about your partner.
2. Tell them about them—in detail.

DAY 5

ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED

We are all worthy of asking for, and receiving, what we need. Needs are not a sign of weakness. Needs are normal, healthy, and human.

Your partner isn't a mind reader. We want our partners to pick up on little hints and signals about what we need and desire. But when you sit and stew on what your partner didn't catch, or isn't doing, it can plant a seed of resentment that spreads like a weed—and is hard to rip out once it's widespread. The antidote: you have to tell your partner what you need and want.

We all have needs. Valid desires. But we don't say them. We drop hints. We suggest. We stay safely in the shadows. We hope our partners will "just know". We tell ourselves a story about why they should be able to figure it out without us having to say it. Then, when our partners fail to magically fulfill those needs, we feel resentful. We begin to believe that our partners don't care, or are thinking only about themselves. And so we criticize them. You always! You never!

And *the end result of criticism*—which is when we take aim at who someone fundamentally is, implying a personality flaw—is *always destructive*. **One simple fix: Ask for what you need!**

Never use criticism to frame your needs. Be specific. Be clear. Be honest. Be positive. Be proactive. Remember, *how you start a conversation sets the tone for how you finish it*. Begin with compassion. Think about what your partner needs to hear in order to really listen to what you need and hopefully respond in a positive way.

Here are a couple examples of the wrong vs. right way to say things:

- **Don't say:** "You never make time for me anymore. Obviously you couldn't care less about our relationship."
- **Do say:** "I feel lonely [your feeling] when we go this long without really spending quality time with each other [the situation]. Can we find some time this week to just be together?" [your positive need]



TODAY'S PRACTICE

1. Reflect on what you most need or want.
2. Ask for what you need—describe what you're feeling, the situation, and ask positively.

DAY 6

REACH OUT AND TOUCH

Positive, meaningful, relaxing, nonsexual touch is great in so many ways.

Touch is a powerful drug. Physical connection has a physiological effect on the body—it *releases oxytocin, the hormone that helps with bonding and connection.* Touch is not just good for your relationship; it's good for your physical health and longevity.

Positive, intimate, relaxing, nonsexual touch—hugging, cuddling, a massage, a foot rub, holding hands, kissing—is great for us all in so many ways. It's relaxing and stimulating. But here's the point, touch for the sake of touch. Physical intimacy does not need to lead to sex for it to be worthwhile.

It's important to not just practice touch, but to talk about it. Ask each other:

- What kinds of touch feel best to you?

- When is your favorite time to be touched or hugged?
- Are there times when, or ways that, you don't want to be touched?

Affectionate touch is going to ramp up your friendship, affection, appreciation, understanding, and trust. And yeah—you'll probably have more sex (i.e. erotic touch), too.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

1. Create as many mini-moments of physical touch as possible
2. The more the better—as long as everyone's all-in

DAY 7

DECLARE A DATE NIGHT

It's not about where you go—or if you go anywhere at all. It's about the two of you, with no distractions.

In 2002, the Sloan Center at UCLA launched a study like none that had ever been done before. They sent social scientists into the homes of busy families—dual-career couples with kids—who recorded each family's every waking moment over the course for one week. The most shocking fact was: the average amount of time that couples spent in conversation with each

other was a mere thirty-five minutes per week. And most of those conversations were about logistics: errands, bills, and the infinite to-do list. If we do this day after day, we lose track of who the other person is. Love maps begin to fade. If we don't look up and pause every so often to check where our partner is—what they're thinking about, what they're worried about,

excited about, what they dream about—when we finally do stop and try to connect with them, they're going to feel really far away. It gets harder and harder to reach them, or for them to reach us.

Couples that loose touch with each other—physically emotionally, and intellectually—end up living parallel lives that have stopped intersecting. Over time, the couple can shut down all forms of openness: to sensuality, to adventure, to play and silliness, to learning together. It all slowly and gradually gets replaced by an infinite to-do list and eventually... loneliness takes the place of connection.

Yes, you want to be successful in your careers, running a home, raising kids—but you don't want to sacrifice your happiness in your relationship in order to do it.

Establish a date night each week. Date night isn't about where you go—or if you go anywhere at all. It's about just the two of you with no distractions. A date is about expanding your love maps.

It's about asking open-ended questions and seeing where you end up. It's about being physically close to each other, in the same space, getting some positive touch from your partner. It should be fun. It's about keeping the adventure and play alive.

Something will always try to snatch away date night. Protect this night at all costs. Making a firm commitment to date night is like setting up a fortress for the two of you against the constant onslaught of the world.

Ground rules for date night:

- No screens
- No phones
- No Netflix
- Ask open ended questions—learn something new about your partner
 - What's on your mind?
 - What are you feeling happy about these days?
 - What was your low point this week?
- Be curious (e.g. "tell me more!")
- Don't assume it's going to end in sex
- Keep it simple—talk, touch, take your time, the two of you together



TODAY'S PRACTICE

1. Don't ever stop dating each other.
2. Plan ahead, set a time every week for date night, be militant about protecting it.

Your mission now is to **make these practices as routine as brushing your teeth**—to solidify them as habits that are a natural part of the rhythm of your day.

By making and maintaining these small changes, you and your partner can entirely change the trajectory of your relationship. Do these "small things often" and realize great change over time!