What If My Partner is Unwilling to Do Emotional Work?

"To communicate is risky, to not communicate is riskier."
—Anonymous

In the sweet afterglow of their lovemaking, she reaches out to touch the smooth muscle of his arm. He pulls her close. "Wait 'til I get my new territory, honey!" he whispers gleefully as they cuddle in the dark. She listens enthusiastically while he shares his excitement about the new sales route he's just been assigned at work. After awhile, she attempts to bring the conversation around to something a bit more personal. "Could we talk about us a little?" she asks. "Sure, honey," he says. Yet, as soon as she mentions something having to do with her emotional needs, he seems to clam up, becoming distant and tense. After awhile, she gives up—what's the use, she thinks, of trying to "get real" with someone who doesn't want to be emotionally open? Although she tries to forgive him for "just being himself," another tiny mound of resentment is formed and festers within her.

Do you often hear of relationships where one person wants to go forward into greater sharing and vulnerability, while the other keeps "digging their heels in," not wanting to break new ground, or upset the status quo? Ever run into this kind of situation in your own life? Ever noticed how partners in intimate relationships tend to become used to the *stability of the familiar,* even when it's not completely satisfying?

Why do some folks seem emotionally shut down? Perhaps they've had negative experiences in the past associated with being "too honest." Others are simply unfamiliar with the "open" approach to relating, and may have been educated in another direction about such matters. Perhaps he or she was taught to be "private," and would see a technique as an intrusion or as "artificial." In addition, some cultures or nationalities are predisposed to emotional privacy. Although we have encountered men who complained that their women were unwilling to share emotionally, more often it's been the women who have sought our help to get the man in their life to "open up." The tools, of course, can be used effectively by either sex.

The Power of One

Is there hope? Over the past ten years we have seen *many* cases where one of the partners saw that the marriage was suffering from a lack of emotional openness, and needed an infusion of new life. By gently introducing the practice of mirroring, and following up with the other tools in this book, the one person was able to initiate a renaissance in the whole family. Because of the fact that the Loving Communication© dynamics are *already* occurring in every communication naturally, it is quite easy and invisible for one partner to simply use them *more consciously*, *more often* and at *critical moments.* You'll soon see, with a little practice, that you can independently affect every relationship in your world with these simple universal tools. One of the beauties of this work is that anyone can use it, anytime, without the cooperation or even the knowledge of the other person! Your partner will *feel* the difference, and may come to wonder enough about the new sense of freedom and ease they experience in your presence, that they ask what you are doing. That's the perfect time to share it with them.

Let's look at some of the creative ways the tools have been used to break through another person's walls. Carrie and Lane, a couple who use the Loving Communication© principles, recounted this experience:

Sleeper

Carrie: Lane and I were sitting in the bedroom on a summer afternoon. I was telling him something important to me, when I noticed him (as I'd noticed on countless occasions) beginning to drift off to sleep. And, as on other countless occasions, I was beginning to take it personally, anger welling up inside me! Why did he do this? Wasn't I important enough to merit being heard?

In the past, when he'd fallen asleep as I was talking, my knee-jerk reaction had been to hurl accusations at him. Mirroring would be out of the question! I'd be so mad all I could do was burst into criticism and rage! This of course would terminate any chance of either of us getting heard. We'd both end up sad and lonely.

This time, I was suddenly inspired to try a different approach. Rather than bursting forth with my anger, I mirrored his sleepiness. I started with, "You're feeling that sleepiness come on, aren't you?" Then I asked, "You're worried I'm going to hold this against you, and you're remembering times when I did that to you, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said (straining to keep his eyes open).

"...and," I continued, "even though, at this moment, I appear to be providing you with safety by mirroring you, you're still afraid that when it's my turn to be mirrored, I'm going to turn on you and condemn you, as usual. And that makes you feel even more sleepy? Is that right?"

"Yes, that's right!" he said, chuckling—a bit more alert.

A light bulb went off in my brain! As an experiment, I wondered what would happen if I were to offer him absolute safety for his sleepiness. "If the sleepiness had a voice, what would it say?" I inquired.

"It would say, 'all I want, is to snuggle up and go to sleep. I just want the safety to get what I need. Falling asleep next to you would be really nice.' "

At that moment a softness came over me, my heart opened. I wanted to give him what he needed and requested.

"It would be wonderful to just relax and fall asleep with me, huh?" I mirrored. I opened my arms as an invitation.

"Yes," he said, "but what I really want to do, what I know is important to do, is to take a look at why I started to fall asleep in the first place."

I was unabashedly blown away by what had just unfolded between us! I had taken the tack of mirroring. Then, I'd made sure he got what he wanted (after years of attacking him for it). This resulted in me getting what I wanted, which was: the disclosure of his caring toward me, his desire to give me his full attention when I talked, and most of all, his desire to really understand what drove his sleepiness.

We explored all of this for the rest of the afternoon. His energy returned. No more sleepiness interfered, and powerful memories and insights surfaced for both of us. He remembered vividly the way his Dad talked "at" him, rarely saying anything to him without some criticism in it. Lane's sleepiness had been a strategy for tuning out when he sensed he was about to get blamed, which (given his experience with Dad) had become associated with almost anything spoken *with intensity* by somebody else (as I would when sharing something important to me).

We were so much closer, and the "sleepiness" issue was never the same again.

Here's how Laura instigated a huge jump in communication for her family:

It Almost Became the Camping Trip from Hell

Laura: We'd been camping at the coast (in tents) and we had all four kids with us. It had been raining almost the whole time. We were hoping it would clear up. Well, we woke up the next morning, and it was pouring, *pouring* rain! We all knew what it was going to be like to pack up—not much fun!! We had breakfast, and pretty soon we could feel the tension building. I was starting to feel anxious. Were we (the adults) going to have to do all the packing ourselves? Would the kids help? The kids were sort of poking at each other, starting to get irritated. All of a sudden I thought, "What if we were to just *stop*, right now, and try and use the tools Rob and I learned at the Loving Communication© Workshop?"

So I proposed it, and everybody agreed. The sharing that followed created a bond that we hadn't felt prior to that. We talked about our fears, including mine about what it was going to be like to pack up, and everybody really listened as each one spoke to completion. After each of us was heard in a deep way, things went like clockwork. The magic that happened out of *everybody just sharing* carried through the rest of the trip, and we had a six hour drive home! The rest of the trip was just wonderful—everybody felt really close, and we had a really good time!

A Woman With a Hardened Shell

What about a man who finds himself attracted to a woman who has been hurt so many times in the past that she has a hardened outer shell? He wants to build a bridge, but can't get past her walls. Once again, we can reference to the idea of "passing." What's happening here is that she is passing him an experience that's been stored inside her since her childhood. It's highly likely that the experience she had in childhood involved a man, probably her father, or someone else who had a *hardened outer shell*.

Too often we hear one partner complain sadly that their mate simply isn't interested in learning communication skills. However, when the "unwilling" partner finally comes in for a session, we often discover that the mirroring was delivered with a "You're going to learn this or else!" attitude. Even these tools can be used like weapons by a frustrated, desperate partner. For instance, one person says condescendingly to the other, "Well, it's obvious *you* must be feeling a lot of *shame*, since you keep passing it to everyone!"

Here's another example of how the tools were introduced to an "unwilling" partner, in a creative, non threatening way:

Julie and Rick

Julie: In the beginning of my relationship with Rick, it was me who first learned about the principles. I tried to interest Rick in mirroring, but he wasn't going for it. One afternoon I was standing in front of him in the living room. He was reading stock reports on the sofa, oblivious to my emotions (as usual), which was lousy for me because I'd been having the most horrible day! To top it off, a relative of mine had just criticized me *very* severely on the phone.

A girlfriend of mine who was into Loving Communication© had been doing mirroring with me and I was getting the hang of it. Anyway, I was frustrated, so I began to mirror *myself* out loud without really thinking about what I was doing. "Julie, you had an absolutely miserable day, didn't you?" I exclaimed. "You're so tense, and your back muscles are so tight, you want to scream! Nothing's working out and you just got yelled at on the phone!" Well, Rick was so intrigued, after awhile he jumped in and started mirroring me himself!

That scene was actually a big turning point in our relationship. Having had a bossy mother, Rick had been interpreting my wanting us to mirror each other like I was shoving it down his throat. And I suppose I *had* been kind of pushy about it. But when he watched me mirror myself, he *saw* me actually getting more relaxed. He could see the validity of mirroring, without it being "forced" on him. But what's really amazing is that it turned out that Rick eventually got better at mirroring than me! (I realize that's a judgement—he just really *understands* my emotions when he's the one doing the mirroring. He's very caring, whereas I tend to get "plugged in" more easily!)

Building Safety—The Appreciation Game

One woman told us that she had been so frustrated for so long about the idea of ever being really heard by her partner, she realized she had been unknowingly "passing" him shame and anger by being constantly critical and unappreciative of him. Now, on top of it, she was about to threaten him into trying this new thing called mirroring! We suggested instead that she begin to rebuild the safety between them by *showing him more appreciation on a daily basis*. "Why am I the one who has to do all the work?" she fumed. We explained that, although both of them were unhappy, she at least was showing an interest in helping them shift. Her husband, on the other hand,

was in a state of constant numbness and apathy, an indication that he was at a higher emotional level than she was.

She was shocked at first about how hard it was to pull off this "appreciation" thing! They had become so mired in criticism and sarcastic "jabs" toward one another, that it seemed hideously awkward and silly now to be kind and sweet. She began by writing him a loving note at least every few days. These little notes contained her heartfelt gratitude toward him, and *specific* things she loved about him. She also added another simple gesture to her repertoire: when he would walk in the door each evening, she made sure to drop anything she was doing and give him a warm greeting and a kiss.

Given the "passing" phenomenon, these few small acts produced profound results. At first he underwent a Displacement Effect during which he became even *more* sarcastic and angry, and suspicious of her loving gestures ("Why are you all of a sudden so *nice*? You must want something from me!") But soon he became more "open" in general and more interested in pleasing her, allowing some of the walls to come down. And soon he began to pass back the "appreciation" experience, and they were ready to begin mirroring each other.

Is Anybody Really Listening?

Are you really listening when your companion speaks? Are you responding to your partner in such a way that encourages him or her to *want* to open up? Here are a few examples of what we mean by listening:

If you are a man, are you giving your partner your full attention when she speaks, or are you reading or watching T.V., and perhaps glancing at her occasionally? Giving her your full attention for a short period of time is better than giving her broken attention over a longer period. Particularly when she needs to be heard about something important, your broken attention can create frustration for you both. Underneath, she yearns to be in flowing rapport with you, but is sometimes having tension, which remains in place as a result of not being heard and understood on some important issues. Each time you mirror her, *rather than offering her solutions or answers,* she relaxes a little.

If you are a woman, when your man makes a comment, for instance, perhaps he says something about wanting to "have fun" this weekend, instead of responding with your *personal opinion*, you might

say, “Sounds great, tell me what your thoughts are about that.” He’d probably immediately open up and share his specific ideas, or if he had none at the moment, he would know that his creativity in that area was welcomed and appreciated by you. You’d be “passing” him an experience of being appreciated, and he would soon pass it back to you in some form. These are nice experiences to pass each other.
Another example: he says something which you might normally be upset by, such as, “Why do you always wear *that* dress?” Instead of saying, “What is *that* supposed to mean?” or defending yourself, or teasing him back, you might respond with, “Gee, it sounds like you would prefer something else, is that true?” Then just let him explain, and mirror his response, his feelings and his positive intent, in a casual way that doesn’t sound like you’re using a technique. Then, be sure any feelings *you* are having get heard completely by him, by gently sharing with him in the form of “I” statements after he has been heard completely (“I was a little hurt because I thought you were saying you didn’t like the way I looked”). He will be glad to hear you once he’s been heard. If he appears other than glad to hear you, he still has unheard feelings and thoughts.
These are two of many ways that these tools can be readily applied to initiate a progressive and complete transformation of any relationship, simply by regularly injecting Mirroring, being aware of Passing, The Displacement Effect (covered later) and the other tools in this book.
Let’s look at a few things one person can do to quickly improve a relationship:
1. Express appreciation to your partner for small things on a daily basis—for things that you see and sense, and also perhaps for things you know he or she does when you are not around.
2. When your partner shares an opinion, idea or viewpoint, mirror his / her thoughts, feelings *casually* but completely before adding your own opinion; do this as often as possible without announcing it, expecting anything in return for it, or making a big deal out of it in any way.
3. Make eye contact while he or she talks to you, giving your partner complete attention.
4. Occasionally offer to do them an *unasked for* favor or courtesy.
5. Instead of waiting for your partner to start, be the first one to do the above.
Stored emotions tend to “create” events to happen to us. These events trigger the emotions to surface and, hopefully (if we allow them to), discharge, as in this story:

Just Call

Jenna: My husband Brad used to come home late from work and not call me. I would have dinner ready, so this got to be incredibly frustrating. It seemed *so* obvious to me that he was being incredibly rude, but he just couldn't see it! My yelling, pleading and threatening made not *one* iota of a difference! He still kept being late and not calling.

One night, he walked in the door, and instead of immediately attacking him about how angry I was, I went and lay down in the bedroom. I lay there on the bed and let every ounce of the rage pour through me. I could hear him taking a shower in the bathroom. Meanwhile, I lay there screaming my guts out, many "levels" of emotion pouring through me.

After awhile I got up, went and said hi, and didn't mention anything to him about his being late, or what I'd just been doing in the bedroom!

From that night on, he never was late again without calling me.

Summary and Helpful Hints

One person can stimulate an improvement for both people in communication by:

—Expressing appreciation on a daily basis.

—Using mirroring, in a casual way, during small daily interactions (where the usual response would be a reactive one), being careful not to let it sound as if a technique is being used.

—Mirroring yourself when you're alone and your emotional level is high.

—Allowing deep emotions to pass through you (seeing them as discharge) when you're alone and your emotional level is high.

—Mirroring yourself out loud while in the presence of those you love.

PLEASE CONSIDER THAN ANY TOOL, WHETHER IT BE A HAMMER OR ONE OF THE ABOVE, WILL HAVE NO EFFECT AT ALL UNLESS APPLIED AND RE APPLIED BY YOU. YOU HAVE THE POWER.

For training, sessions, books and personal contact, please call: Fred J. Keyser @ 858 450 0189. Thank you kindly for your attention.

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- Passing the Experience $12.00
- Mirroring-The Magical, Simple Skill $12.00