

RELATIONSHIP RESILIENCE

Staying Secure When Life Gets Loud

By Steve Gray

- Relationship Resilience -

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Preface

‘Derek, I just read the book, ‘Relationship.’ A Guide to Building Lasting Connections... and well Derek, you don’t fit, so I have to say ‘goodbye.’ Mind you there have been some fun moments.’

Derek stopped stirring the sugar into his coffee, stunned into silence, for a few seconds at least. He cleared his throat rather awkwardly. Shook his head slightly, then looking into his coffee cup he responded loudly with. ‘Say WHAT!’

Sharon responded, ‘I feel sure you heard me... I have come to this decision before things might get out of hand, now it’s a good thing that you still live with your mates and I’m over here in my place and well, I want to call off our hanging out together, there’s too many indicators that this will not go well in the long run. How do you feel about that?’

Derek was in shock, and chortled, ‘But what about?’ And was then lost for words. Sharon looked at him and quietly mentioned, ‘It’s just as I thought, you haven’t really thought about things between you and me, you just keep turning up after the early niceties, and then figure this is a good gig, and we will ease into doing things your way after thinking I might be totally hooked by your love bombing and then by your starting to add in some coercive things and who knows what could be next. So before things go any further, *thanks but no thanks.*’

Sharon went to the sink and washed out her cup. Derek was struck by the suddenness of what she had said and then tried to soften things with, ‘But babe!’ Sharon smiled, figuring Derek might try some lovey dovey comment to try and turn things around.

She added, ‘Nope, I’m not buying the *babe* bit, not at all, like I said, things were interesting for a while but I’m not going to continue with our relationship. I really want to be clear about that.’

‘What did this book say then, what were the specifics, it sounds like it’s a brainwashing book of some kind, I want to see it...’ He blurted. ‘Well it’s at work at the moment but it did point out how things between couples could become toxic, and how one part of the relationship might become controlling, or they might love bomb the other person to make them feel some connection early on and then that might fade out, all with the aim of controlling anything, from who they see, to who they talk to, finances, you name it. So before

any of that emerges I decided to take control of my future, then as such I decided that it wouldn't include you.'

Derek wanted to respond and mention the good times, but he knew the stare that Sharon had, it was solid, silent and had one eyebrow slightly higher than the other, with her hands on her hips, she could become a fortress, so he knew not to bother responding.

He finished his coffee and gently mentioned, 'Well, thanks for the memories. I guess I should head off then?' Sharon smiled, 'Yep, that would be good.' He grabbed his keys and slowly headed out the door. At the last minute Sharon called out, 'Oi remember to give me the key...' Derek turned and took her key off his key ring, then put it on the side table by the door and said, 'Bye.'

Inside Sharon was not at all sure about how she felt, she knew it took some deal of strength to raise the subject, but better now than in some awkward future. She took a deep breath and sighed, then carefully said out loud, 'Next.' Her thoughts then turned to the book, thinking, 'Thank goodness I woke up to Derek, who would have thought, one book, about some people doing a course on relationships, could have such a useful effect. Maybe I should look up some other works by the same author?'

Chapter One

Alice and Tony have been starting to 'hang out' for a while, after meeting at a friends party, turning twenty one seems so old school for a reason to party, but hey they both went, meeting through friends who have little in the way of connection but one thing led to another and they were soon ready to head off on a journey together.

It started with catching up for coffee two days later. Then a movie and some drinks at a bar after the matinee, it turned into a light dinner and both found the other amicable and interesting to chat to. Alice was soon telling work buddies that Tony was a nice enough guy and was enjoying their catch ups.

Alice's Mother was wary, her precious youngest child was starting to spend time with a boy. She could only hope that he was a nice guy. She reminded Alice of the relationship her sister Ruth had with, 'That nasty guy Barry!' He caused the family no end of grief with Ruth having to 'disappear' for a while until Barry eventually got the hint and went elsewhere. He promised he would 'get even' with Ruth and a restraining order was sought. Thankfully they had not moved in together although Barry had hounded Ruth to move in with him.

Alice recalled the chilling details all too clearly and was well aware that things could go bad fast. She had two friends who had ended up in messy relationships, one was 'stuck' the other was struggling, fearing for the worst, told who they could hang out with and how they were tracked at every step by their 'well meaning partners,' They said they were, 'Only protecting them...' From what or whom was anyone's guess.

Alice's dad was also on edge and provided some wisdom, in a carefully worded chat with Alice well out of mum's earshot. 'You know we love you, you know you're smart, you know lots of things and I really like your problem solving skills, well proven many times at work and at school, you don't get good results for doing nothing. But I just want you to be able to navigate your early relationships with care, we don't want another 'Ruth affair', that was a bit much to bear.'

Alice agreed and added a few points: what she was looking for, what she noticed and how the pair were communicating. She was quite happy; so far, but well aware of how things could go. Tony had already been in two relationships that were short flings, but this was

Alice's first real attempt at getting to know someone on a deeper level, rather than just as friends of friends etc.

It wasn't long before Alice bought Tony over one weekend to meet her parents. She introduced them one Saturday afternoon. She wanted to allow Tony to meet them without having too much prewarning, and an anxious build up to *meeting the parents*. So Alice suggested that he could drop over and maybe meet Ruth, she suggested he could help her with an issue with her desktop computer.

Tony arrived and was at the door, a brilliantly warm Spring afternoon. Alice opened the fly wire screen door and led Tony in, her parents were at the island bench in the kitchen about to have a coffee. Alice had told them he was coming but surprised Tony. The pair headed through the house, down the hall to the kitchen, Tony thinking he might meet older sister Ruth. They got to the kitchen with Alice talking all the way, then in the kitchen her parents were all smiles.

Alice then casually mentioned, 'So Tony, this is Greta, and Frank my mum and dad.' Both put out their hands to shake hands with Tony, Greta then said, 'The kettle has just been put on, and I figure you're either a coffee or hot chocolate kind of guy. Which would you prefer?' Tony rather nervously said, 'Hot chocolate thanks.' Frank quickly added on, 'Here to have a look at the computer, you know that's one of those things I just haven't really got my head around.'

Tony cleared his throat and mentioned how he fiddles about with the computers at work, Frank didn't pry deeper. Letting Tony fill them in if he wanted to. Alice chimed in with 'Apparently Tony's boss is a bit the same dad, hasn't figured out the computer stuff but instead hires an ace like Tony.' Tony's head twinged as he smiled, not used to being called an Ace. But he did like it.

Hot chocolate in hand Greta smiled and invited him to sit on one of the stools rather than stand, she then said 'Oh go on Tony, tell us all about yourself, we're dying to know!' Both Frank and Greta smiled wildly and shook their heads in unison, just three times as if they had practised it.

Tony gave them a rundown, one suburb away, although the far end of the suburb, what school he went to, things he liked at school, where he worked, Fletchley and Green Consulting, and what he did for pleasure, watching the footy, he followed Hawthorn, Alice followed the Geelong cats so that was an interesting difference. He then mentioned his parents briefly, his dad was a supervisor for a commercial airconditioning company, his mother a receptionist for a rent management company.

The chatter went on for a while, the parents keeping things amicable, casual and positive. They knew from experience with Ruth that in that instance she was advised that her partner was an idiot as Frank put it. And forcing his opinion was the worst thing he could have done, it simply pushed Ruth into a corner, so to speak.

Tony fiddled with the computer, updated some software and restarted the machine. A bit of testing and it was now running fine. Greta called out, 'Another Hot Choc Tony?' he replied, 'No thanks Mrs Gordon, I'm fine thanks.' Frank smiled at Greta and chuckled, 'Mrs Gordon, now there's a thing!' As Tony came back through the kitchen on his way out with Alice, Greta said, 'Okay, boyo, you have chatted to us long enough you can call me Greta but only as long as you call him Frank, OK?' Tony nodded and said 'Okay, that sounds like a plan.'

The pair headed out the front of the house and Alice gave him a peck on the cheek to say thanks, that was their first moment of intimacy, Tony was pleased with that. Somehow he instinctively knew not to push things further, a peck is a good start he thought.

Chapter Two

The week started off normally and Alice was in a solidly good mood on Monday, her parents were impressed with Tony and said so. She didn't need their approval but was pleased to hear they were, at this stage, happy. Alice was fairly new at Gregson builders, her role was to help on reception, filing and admin, then coordinate the tradies from time to time. Her boss gave her the added responsibility of developing a thorough checklist so that each job could be readily and accurately tracked, currently things were a bit haphazard.

It was about three weeks later, a smartly dressed young guy walked through the doors at Gregson builders, he had a charming manner, introduced himself and then handed Alice three

promotional fliers. And invited her to distribute them to the workers, they were drumming up participants for an upcoming seminar on relationships, how to build positive relationships was his emphasis.

The gent headed off and Alice took the opportunity to read through the details. There was a website to check things out further, then a sign up section for the seminar. It was a one evening seminar which was free for young couples or singles wanting to learn more about 'Building Positive Relationships.' A Guide to Building Lasting Connections.

Something about the details on the website caught Alice's attention, 'Things might start off fine but what do you do if things start to go bad?' She thought about friends who had struggled and Ruth's first challenge.' She copied the web address and emailed it to Tony. She thought it might test him a bit to see if he's into exploring things a little deeper. Not that we are doing anything wrong but you never know what you might learn.

Alice showed the flier to her mum, she nodded and thought it couldn't hurt, after all it was free, the only other thing she said was, 'Is it run by a religious group? You don't want to end up in some cult...' Alice said it looked okay from that point of view, the guy running the seminar had written a book on the subject, Wayne Plum. She had checked out his personal website and he was clearly an expert in his field, judging by the positive testimonials he had and the list of companies he had worked with.

Tony responded by sending a text message to Alice, he liked the idea that it gave him an excuse to catch up with Alice more often without having to think about 'activities' for them to do together. 'Hey Alice, this could be good value, count me in!' Alice jumped onto the website and organised the tickets to the event. 'A Guide to Building Lasting Connections.'

The event soon came around on the calendar and the pair headed off. The auditorium wasn't too big, it probably held about two hundred people and tonight it was almost packed. Chairs set out standard theatre style. As they entered the main seminar room, Wayne stood in the doorway and gave everyone a wide smile, a nod and a gentle 'fist bump.' The last person in, and the lights on the front stage became brighter then the background music faded. On the stage were two flip charts and a bar stool in the middle.

Wayne waited to one side as everyone found a seat, on each chair was a simple booklet and a pen. Wayne introduced himself, He wore a sharp corporate suit, he was tall with a commanding voice. He started with a couple of questions and invited people to put their hand up if each question connected with them, ‘Have you ever been in a relationship, or know of a relationship that went sour?’ He would then raise his hand and nodded, glancing around the room. The audience were soon in agreement as he asked various questions.

He would then brainstorm some of the key things that related to the topic and then would ask another question and so on.

Wayne had the audience in the palm of his hands, listening intently, inviting people to call out key aspects for the questions he asked. He then invited them to brainstorm in small groups of four or five people. The small books turned out to be blank pages with the front page printed with Wayne’s corporate logo. They were to write down their notes and brainstorming points using the booklet.

Each group would share their findings, Wayne would note the key points and write them on one of the flip charts. He then thanked them for their responses and related stories he had collected from past participants in his course, some were harrowing stories of control and manipulation and how it led to negative outcomes. He then said that ‘after the break, they would discuss some ways they could overcome these sorts of challenges and what comes next.

There was a break for fifteen to twenty minutes, tea, coffee and some simple snacks provided. The room hummed with positive comments on what had been presented and their responses to the stories and anecdotes Wayne had shared that hit home in so many ways. Wayne’s staff wandered the room, ensuring things were in order, any mess sorted out and so on, and of course they were listening for any challenging chatter that might take place.

The break over, Wayne recapped on what they explored in the first half and then outlined that he ran a course over a few weeks that helped people ‘tackle various relationship issues, with ease, in *street smart* ways.’

He then had his team pass around handouts that related to key areas, each with an image and space for the participants to write in a response. Wayne would chat about each

point and say an answer that related to each image, the responses were designed to be easy to follow and often obvious. Each query was related to some form of research with statistics and data to build credibility. In all there were four sheets of information handed out, on topics like communication, respect, trust, and finance.

The final handout of the session was a flier for signing up for the course with details on when, where etc. The course was \$2500 per couple or \$1200 for a single person. The deal was for tonight only the 'normal price' was \$2700 and \$1300 respectively.

Tony looked at Alice and like many of the others in the room they chatted for a little while, some were very eager to sign up and others were a bit more reluctant. Out the front, the tables that held the food earlier, were now set up with eftpos machines ready to take payment. Tony said to Alice that he thought the cost was a little high. She then said, 'I see it as an investment in our respective futures, and by the way it comes with a one hundred percent refund if you're not happy after the first two sessions.' They smiled at each other and paid half each, ready to go the next step.

The next day both received emails from Wayne Plum, thanking them for their commitment, he then added a free bonus, in a booklet valued at twelve dollars, that was 'loaded' with bonus material, if they paid now, by following the link. It would be sent out after the first session. Both bought the book, the link also had some questions to ponder before the first session, to get their minds thinking about what they wanted to get out of being in a relationship. He challenges them to list their 'non-negotiables' using a real-time digital polling app. These are the personal standards that protect your peace, safety, and core values. The details mentioned understanding and defining your standards around self-respect.

Chapter Three

The pair caught up on the phone to discuss their non-negotiables. Alice's internet search gave her a few clues and after a chat with her mum, she had a few starting points, Tony didn't have much of a clue, but did research values, respect was one, and empathy, the same for Alice but she added security and life altering situations that might arise in the future, like having kids. Greta suggested she leave that one out in a phone conversation. They added their findings to the polling app.

It wasn't long before they were at the next training session, ready to explore what came next. People arrived at the venue, they were given clip on name tags and then stood chatting in the side area to the training room, the doors to that were closed. Background music played. Right on, one minute to seven o'clock, the music picked up. Then at seven, the doors opened to the training room, and the crowd filed in. There were about thirty people all up.

Each seat had a folder on it and a pen, the folder was empty at this stage apart from some blank lined sheets for taking notes. Wayne wandered in as one of the last people in the room, at the back was a table with two of his team seated, ready to assist with providing handouts.

There's a welcome chat, then a sheet is handed out on the guidelines Wayne wants them to live by while in the training space, he says 'These are my non-negotiables.' He then pulls out a yellow silk cloth and gently waves in front of him, he then flips it into the air with one hand and it instantly changes to red. He then makes it somehow disappear. He added, 'That's what happens if a 'thing' starts to happen, it starts out as Yellow, and if it turns to red, VOOM, it disappears and yes folks there are no refunds!'

He then went on to explain why, and how he had created this list and how the course would challenge people at times and push some of their personal boundaries. 'But rest assured we do this to ensure you get the most out of the course and get you thinking about what you want from a relationship, both personally and professionally.'

He went on to explore what people had written about their non-negotiables. Firstly he asked, who discussed these together and who didn't, noting that both were okay ways to explore the points being asked. About half did it one way and the others did it differently. A slide showed up on a big screen at the front of the room with the points raised. One by one Wayne read them out and then had his assistants provide a pre punched handout for their folders.

He then showed them what professional researchers and psychologists had found to be the key 'non-negotiables,' and another handout came after he chatted about the findings and how similar the lists were from the participants and the professional studies. The first two points were, respect and communication.

Wayne mentions that, 'Respect is not passive; it is an active acknowledgment of your boundaries and that of the person you are working with or in a relationship with.' He then gave some simple examples of a few forms of respect and then invited the participants to get into small groups, no bigger than six and brainstorm examples of respect they could come up with. He then gave them some easy to follow guidelines that went up on a slide, on aspects of brainstorming. It started with introducing yourself and your partner.

They were given a time limit, but not told how long that would be. Most of the participants were a little nervous to begin with, while others were as confident as could be, some dominating the group discussion.

Wayne called out 'Thirty seconds left' then wrapped things up at the end. He pointed out that they had already done most of this exercise at the introductory seminar, but now, they were thinking more deeply about the information, having more time and the *lead in poll* on the website. 'Already you have become more immersed in the subject and are well on your way to becoming more advanced in your relationship skills.'

Each group got to share their findings, Wayne jotted down the key points on one of the flipcharts. There was then a chat from Wayne on key aspects of respect and how it formed the apex of all discussions from this point onwards, he drew a pyramid on the other flip chart and wrote 'Respect' at the top. He then wrote communication below that. A slide showed up on the screen that had a bunch of words with the middle letters missing, it was still possible for people to read what the message was without the middle words in place. He got them to all read it out at once so if any participants weren't sure about the words they would hear it from others.

Again the brainstormed points about communication, but this time, form a group with people you haven't worked with yet. 'Oh by the way, respect other people's input and ideas. Form your groups and let's get started. The same thing happened, their ideas were shared, then the information from the experts were added. Wayne then explored the key points like active listening and gave examples, he then worked through the list and invited each group to add in if they had an example that fitted to each point.

There was a break, the assistants had put out snacks in the side room along with water, juices and mineral water. People were now more animated in chatting to each other. And gladly devoured the snacks on offer. At the end of the break time the background music changed, the same piece of instrumental music played that called them to return to the training area.

Wayne explained the ‘coming into the room’ music and how it was an important part of the process, then why there wasn’t any tea or coffee. There was a brief chat about stimulants and how he wanted a ‘level playing field.’ He then asked, with a double open handed gesture ‘How are we doing, everything okay?’ most participants nodded in the affirmative. He smiled and then briefly said, ‘I like that we live in a democracy, it’s all about majority rule and most of you are smiling so that’s a good thing right? YEP.’ He then changed his position on the stage and went on to the next part of the training.

Part two of communication, a slide showed up, then handouts were given with the following.

‘Communication is generally divided into four core methods: verbal, non-verbal, written, and visual. Understanding these allows you to tailor your message based on the situation, audience, and context.’

There was space beneath that with each point at the start of the space and a few lines, Wayne chatted about each point and invited the participants to jot down a bit of information on each. At the end of this process an ‘official’ handout was given that had a more long winded ‘professional response.’ to each point. The audience read or glanced through the second sheet, he suggested that at some stage during the week that they take a look at both and explore the differences, if any.

Wayne then invites the participants to open their folders to a blank page, he then states he will give instructions and they are to each draw out what he describes, without looking at anyone else’s drawing. He then described drawing a simple yacht with two sails, on the open sea. He then shows them his example, a wavy line across the page in landscape mode with a mid sized yacht in the middle.

They then compared the results, some drew a small yacht, some a big one, then some added in a smiling sun in the sky, another added a dolphin jumping out of the water. All were given the same instructions but they all drew a different image. There was some discussion as to what happened and why different people interpreted the instructions differently.

This was followed by another exercise where Wayne read out some instructions to see if the participants could figure out what the result was, it's an exercise called 'As I was Walking to St Ives.' It's a common trick story and generally well known. But it's amazing how many people don't get the instructions and come up with different responses to what was being said. Again they explored why that happened.

As part of the closing proceedings, Wayne did a recap of what was covered, going through the flip charts and what was said, what happened and some key responses if any. He invited questions. They then cleared the room of the chairs and they were invited to form a circle. Wayne then introduced them to a simple but amusing exercise he called a 'whooshy,' he showed them how it worked as he told them, 'You stand back on one foot and then rock through on to the other foot.' They did this a few times to get the action right, Wayne then added, then you take your right arm and extend it behind you, then have your left hand in front of your, trust me this works!' They then did the same rocking slowly from one foot to the other with their arms extended.

Finally he finished by showing them the final action, where you bring the right hand through and hit your other hand and say 'WOOSH.' as you do it, the aim being to 'lock in all of the sessions thoughts and ideas.' There were lots of giggles and people saying 'Wait, which hand where?' Over each session, they would repeat this procedure at the end and watched with interest as their competency grew.

Alice and Tony had a lot to discuss on the way home, the trip seemed to take no time at all. Tony dropped Alice off and headed to his place. Both were very pleased they had decided to do the course and were buzzing with excitement about various things said, explored and so on.

The booklet they were promised came via email as an ebook. It's bonus material was a little heavy they thought but perhaps it would make more sense as things progressed. The key findings in the booklet are:

Relationship non-negotiables are the personal standards that protect your peace, safety, and core values. They are not superficial preferences (like height or hobbies), but absolute deal-breakers. While they differ for everyone, universal baselines typically include mutual respect, emotional availability, physical and emotional safety, aligned long-term goals, and basic financial accountability.

While individual lists can vary widely, these standards generally fall into a few essential categories:

- **Safety & Respect:** Complete absence of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse is paramount. Disrespect, name-calling, and controlling behaviors are universally considered immediate deal-breakers.
- **Trust & Loyalty:** Honesty, fidelity, and accountability are universally necessary foundations. Your partner should own their mistakes and protect your reputation when you are not in the room.
- **Emotional Availability:** You cannot build a healthy partnership with someone who is constantly checked out. Your partner must be able to communicate through conflicts without shutting down or stonewalling.
- **Core Values & Lifestyle:** You must be on the same page about life-altering decisions. These include views on having children, monogamy, finances, home, investments and religious or political alignment.

Understanding and defining your standards is about self-respect. To clarify your personal boundaries, consider reading deeper.

Chapter Four

Our excitable pair caught up between the training sessions and discussed respect and called each other out on something they might have said, or not said, that disrespected the other person, they were often minor things but were worthy of some discussion. The booklet they ordered turned up, more information exploring relationships.

Greta and Frank listened intently as Alice told them all about what had happened at the training session and how professional the whole thing was. They were rather impressed.

Frank mentioned that he thought the course was a bit expensive but now in the light of day it looked like good value.

Alice and Tony were off for the second session eagerly awaiting what they would come across this time. Tony mentioned some communication issues he spotted at work with Alice listening intently, being rather mindful of respecting Tony's chat time. She then thought, he needs to also be respectful of taking up my time. She jotted down a note to ask Wayne about that, after all he did mention he would gladly answer any questions that arose.

The side room was a buzz with people eagerly chatting, some were a little reserved, later revealing that they had argued about some aspect of respect and how far that should extend.

The training sessions started and Alice was among a small group who asked questions at the start, relating to the last training session, 'How do you invite someone to be respectful of the other person's time?' She then gave an example that related to work, Giving Tony the respect of not being made an example of. Wayne responded by asking the whole group how they might deal with that. He then picked out the response that best fitted to his example, using the collective intelligence of the group to add depth to the response. 'Invite the person to speak within some clear guidelines. For instance, we have five minutes before a client arrives, and we both need to put our points forward, therefore you get two minutes and so do I.'

The session began in earnest, tonight's theme was based around trust. Wayne showed an example video of a person with a blindfold on being instructed by their partner to negotiate three chairs to get to a point across the other side of the room where an X had been marked on the floor with red tape. All they had were verbal statements from their partner, one step this way, two steps that way, stop etc.

Wayne chatted about some of the challenges the pair in the video faced. Voice clarity, volume, understanding left from right, clarity of statements. He then got the group to try this, but with a twist. They moved the chairs out of the way and Wayne's assistants set up the room with four chairs and two X's on the floor, one at the front and one at the back. Volunteers were invited, one with a blindfold and one without to guide the person, the guide had to

remain at one end of the room well away from the X on the floor, the other pair were at the opposite end of the room and guided their person to the other X.

It was quite funny, at first the voices would occasionally get mixed up and through some 'wangling' they negotiated the chairs okay. Then there was a chat about what took place and any issues. They then changed places with another couple. But this time the assistants changed the position of the chairs once the blindfolds went on. And an extra one was added, therefore the participants with the blindfold on thought they knew the path to their X, but the 'terrain' had altered.

More discussion, this time about how things can change and the expected journey alters. The next pair lined up and this time the audience were handed a few pieces of paper, with instructions to talk a little as the blindfolded person wandered about, the interruptions made for some interesting outcomes. Wayne also added a time limit to this one to make it harder.

In the end there was a good amount of laughter and fun was had. Wayne then shared, 'Any exercise beyond this level would probably end up with people intervening in inappropriate ways.' They then reset the chairs.

Wayne then shared a video of 'trust exercises,' a common one is, where a bunch of people catch a person falling, then there's a few where the person falls the wrong way or the group is not prepared for the weight of the person falling in the correct way. More laughter ensues.

More discussion around trust, and how it fits to respect and communication, a handout was presented to the participants, with examples given a quick read through, before the mid time break.

The break was 'a buzz' with laughter and comments about the previous exercise.

Music up, participants in. They were getting used to the routine. No announcement was made to head back in, just the music. Wayne asked for questions... Alice put her hand up, stood and said, 'I have a friend who has struggled with relationships, thinking that a past relationship has set her path in concrete, or that her first experience means all of her

experiences will be the same and I figure she is a bit insecure about getting into another relationship, any thoughts on that?’

Wayne smiled and said, ‘Yep bring her along to one of our intro seminars!’ There was some chuckling about that. He then mentioned, ‘Seriously, a lot of people do the same, they think one way due to a simple thing like that, a previous relationship goes sour and so they want to avoid that and stay out of relationships either permanently or for a long while.’ Wayne changed position on the stage and added. ‘Even if they continue to have other relationships with a positive outcome, they often reflect back to the one bad relationship, they probably need to be reminded that that relationship is now just a memory, it doesn’t mean things will happen like that again, but they seem to always look out for it and become wary.’

Tony added a thought for Wayne to explore. ‘A friend at work stirs up his partner by saying her career ambitions, passions, or alone-time is a *silly waste of time* and seems to make her feel guilty for prioritising her goals, is this a thing?’ Wayne nods, Yep he probably doesn’t want her to grow, so he can control what she does, who she does it with etc. He simply runs down her thinking so he can have things his way, often a person doing this wants a partner to be just the way they want them to be, basically it’s stifling. Some of the outcomes for non compliance we see on a weekly or daily basis, and that’s where the non conforming leads to death. Brought on by ongoing domestic abuse.’

A slide came up on the screen, the heading was ‘Types of Abuse.’ it listed, Physical, Coercive Control, Emotional and Psychological Abuse, Financial Abuse, Social Isolation, Sexual Abuse, and Neglect. Wayne ran through each point and mentioned there is a handout for each of these, you can add in the details as you wish.

Tony asked if Wayne knew he was going to ask that question, because he had the handouts ready and the topic seemed to fit into what was coming next. Wayne nodded, ‘It always seems to come up at about this point, one way or another.’ Then came another slide, ‘Examples that may show abuse.’ This had pointers like, bruises, social withdrawal, and the need to ask permission to attend an event.’

All this led to a conversation about why some people wanted to control and manipulate. The discussion then went to Bullying, harassment, nagging and badgering. ‘It can start off small and seemingly insignificant. It might seem like someone is simply reminding you of

something, then that grows and gets to a point where the *badgering* becomes *nagging*, then *harassment*, which turns into bullying. Sometimes this is mixed with guilt as a device to make them feel awkward.'

Another slide showed up, with a couple of quotes from victims of Domestic Abuse. Each slide had a single quote followed by a negative outcome 'Three weeks later the victim was found dead.' There were six slides, then a final one that said, 'But this doesn't have to happen.' It faded and Wayne piped up with. 'That's probably the main reason some of you are here, if not most. You want to find ways to prevent becoming some sort of bad statistic.'

There was an awkward silence after that as Wayne moved to a new position on the stage, ready to explore the next topic. Values and Beliefs, it was a throw back topic to explore a bit more deeply where they had started, it then led into difference and similarities with each other's values. For instance finances, one person might want to have a few credit cards, while the other has no credit cards and only spends money if they have enough in surplus. Therefore there can be differences of opinion, even though in other areas they may be quite compatible.

It was explained that some of the reasons people had conflict was due to differences in values and beliefs. Wayne had a slide that said. 'Compatibility isn't about being identical; it is about managing your differences with grace.' He went on to explain that you have to know the differences to be able to explore them, like the notion of respect, some people will say 'Yes, you need to respect me, but if their partner says the same they frown upon it suggesting that they are not worthy of it.'

Some key areas that had been explored in the 'non negotiable' discussion way back at the start, respect, trust and so on. By now you have probably worked on your list of values and explored various beliefs. They then got to call out the key values each had and Wayne got one of his assistants to write type them up on the screen as they called them out. There was some discussion about some of the main values with a handout of examples of respect points and how vital they were in positive relationships. The other value and belief points were discussed with examples given and clarification sought where required.

The session finished with the obligatory 'Whooshy,' The participants were soon on their way, eager to join in the next week for the next chapter to be explored.

Chapter Five

An interesting week in between sessions was had by Alice and Tony, Alice finally got to meet Tony's parents, Karen and Mike. They were also interested in what the course involved. Karen had some examples of friends who had been through difficult relationships and many of the points rang true.

Alice also met Toby, the family dog, a groodle of sorts, light honey brown and known to sniff out people it did or didn't like, it was quite happy thank you very much wagging its tail with delight after the official initial sniff, accepting her pats, each time Toby had the chance to nuzzle and get some attention. This was a point not lost on Karen, she valued the dogs judgement very much, today especially

Tony looked across at Alice, she had been sitting chatting with his parents for quite a while now. He had suggested to them that she was a special girl and how similar their values were. She was smiling, engaged in their conversation and he sensed that she was more than a smart girl, she was someone he wanted to spend a lot of time with.

A short while later, the sun came through the kitchen window as some clouds cleared outside. It lit up Alice's profile from where Tony was seated, he thought, wow, what a stunner. He knew he liked how she looked, *a healthy specimen of a human* he always thought, but today the connection with his parents and the sunshine on her profile somehow added something fresh to that line of thought.

Tony listened intently, noting that the discussion went from the course they were doing to what work Alice did, across to the work that Mike and then Karen did. The whole time Alice was interested and engaged in what was being said, just as his parents were when she spoke.

Alice left later that afternoon, most impressed with Tony's family. Karen smiled as Tony re-entered the room after seeing Alice off to her car. 'Wow what a fabulous lady Alice is Tony, she is really nice, and the real deal, not some trumped up plastic chick, she's well rounded in her approach to things and a warm soul.' Mike then piped up, 'Yep a fabulous kid, a real keeper. I guess that course you're doing is aimed at making sure you keep a keeper, or

scrap a non keeper...I guess you then have to keep the keeper keepable.' Tony smiled, his dad's humor was a little awkward at times but hey he tried.

The subject changed, Tony wanted to know his dad's view on finances. Loosely put this had been discussed in bits and pieces along the way as Tony was growing up. The course had raised some issues about compromising on financial issues with your partner, but the 'nitty gritty's.' he wasn't sure about. 'Dad, basically it's been shown that most discussions that turn bad in a relationship are based around finances and differing values, how did you guys handle that?'

Mike's eyebrows raised and he shifted in his seat a little. 'Well, yeah it's a big issue for a lot of people, some do okay and others, well yeah it can turn into a mess. But what your mother and I did, after a few tough discussions about money, was to have three accounts, mine, hers and a common one. The common one had to have enough in it to pay the mortgage, and all the other joint bills.

We watched a guy on the TV one night on one of those lifestyle shows and he said this worked the best in most cases. The challenge was we both had credit cards and a standard statement account, Karen owed more on her credit card than I did, so I had to lead by example and close mine as soon as I paid it out. It was the best thing I ever did, that account was costing me big time in interest!'

Tony added in, 'So how long before mum jumped in and cleared her credit card account?' 'Oh that took a while, she was working, then got pregnant with you, she had no income for about five years and so she couldn't pay the account down without input from me. I joked with her that I would give her a loan... I don't suggest you do that by the way... it didn't go down too well! But it finally got sorted, we have only had the three main accounts since then.'

'What about investments?' 'Well that's a bit different, first of all you need to be in a position to save some extra to put into some form of investment. That meant having the mortgage at a controllable level. It then started as a savings thing, putting a bit in from our common bills account into a separate account and let it grow. But let's not get ahead of ourselves here, one of the big things about finances is what gets bought, I prefer name brands, your mum likes no name brands most of the time. She says we save money, I say some of

those cheapy brands taste like crap and if I'm living my life to the full, then I want flavour etc. the same with restaurants, she would go for something cheap, I would go mid to high range. Then the argument would start!'

'Were there many arguments about finances?' 'No not really, we do okay, especially when you start to compare notes with friends... the neighbours at our old house used to argue badly about money. He earned it, she spent it and he didn't know where it went.'

'Dad, back to investments...' 'Yeah okay, well you both have to agree on the investment, oh and a lotto ticket is NOT an investment... At first we bought some shares, didn't have a clue, picked some, a few went up in value and a few went the other way! I then got some advice from a guy at work who was doing quite well. There's some books that you can get that give really decent clues and these days with youtube videos and all that it's a lot easier than when we started.'

'What happened next? I went to a seminar with a real estate company, it was the nineties and people were wanting to make money off real estate, some of the companies turned out to be a scam, some took too much in fees and all that so you mum and I figured out the basics of it all by chatting to our accountant, back then they could give some financial advice.

We then bought our first property and kept an eye on the finances of that, then a second property five years later. Thankfully the value of the first one went up quite fast and the other one was slower. But they did okay, the rent from each paid most of the mortgage on those, we had to tip in some \$\$ but hey we fully expected that. What we didn't expect was when the people moved out and the time it took to get a new tenant.'

'Did superannuation make a difference to all that?' 'Yep it's a savings device that you don't have to think about, and now as we get closer to retirement, we will be able to get further ahead in the wealth stakes. Who knows, we might have enough that we can help pay for a wedding...'

'Whoa! Not just yet dad, but thanks for the prompt!' 'Mike smiled, 'Remember there's this old saying that masterpieces take time, for some people they take a LONG time, for others it's less. For instance I knew a guy whose father tipped in the same amount that he

saved into a wealth account. He thought that was good, but discovered that once he got married his partner wanted to spend the money, he would argue that it's wealth, you keep growing it, she argued, what good is it if you don't get the benefit from it? They also discovered that his dad was a signatory to the account, any amount out had to be sanctioned by him! They got wealthy but with a solid degree of bitterness on her behalf.'

Karen came back into the room, she had been sorting some things out in the dining room and had heard most of the conversation. She added, 'Your dad did most of the wealth stuff, attending seminars and all that, I only wish I had been there and read some of the things he did so that I had more of an understanding of how it all works.'

Tony had fuel for thought, he would see how things panned out with Alice before making any 'rash' decisions. But now he had some ideas on how he might move forward. He then recalled there was a guy at the course who had put some business cards on the networking table, he was a financial planner. Perhaps he could add in some details to help make sense of wealth and finances.

Chapter Six

By the time the next course session came around Alice and Tony had caught up and discussed the state of play with finance, they had been given homework from Wayne's admin team via email, 'Compare the difference in the values you and your partner have, discuss and be nice!'

Alice had a fairly responsible attitude with her finances, noting her parents hadn't always done well, 'If I got pocket money as a kid, it wasn't regular, a few dollars here and a few there, even though my chores still had to be done. Then there was a time that mum got a credit card and spent up big on clothes, then got a shock at the end of the month! Back then people had little idea of how credit worked, she certainly learnt her lesson! Dad was livid apparently. But they do okay these days.'

Tony shared his chat with Mike. Then added a few things he had researched online, there were certainly differing views, but one thing that bubbled up through the cracks from time to time was this 'Cut up your credit cards NOW!' There were examples of people paying way too much interest but chose to ignore that in favour of 'getting a bargain.' Only to

find the bargain ended up costing more than the actual price due to the interest they had to pay.

The pair had a bit of a think about what the ideal situation might look like. Tony noted how it looked a lot like what his dad had said, two separate accounts, one common account and a savings account for building wealth. The discussion then turned to understanding wealth, so they did an internet search and came up with a couple of versions.

They then chatted about the value of wealth, you can have it, but not use it in the sense of spending it on day to day things, for instance as equity in a house you own, the equity has value but not as cash, asset rich but cash poor is a key term used by many advisors. The pair took note of that, wanting to have enough cash to be able to live, without having to scrimp and save and end up with a miserly, miserable life. They decided that their ideal financial setup would have a wealth account, a play money account, for holidays and special things and then separate accounts for each to spend their money as they wished.

The next course session had a focus on finances and goal setting, the two issues went solidly hand in hand, Tony and Alice enjoyed all of it, noting each time that the discussion covered something they had previously discussed, observing that they were basically being given approval from experts for their ideas. Alice thought it was funny, here they were with a map being developed for their future, but they had only been going out for a few months, both still living at home. She pondered the notion of love, sure she really liked Tony, but love? She smiled gently to herself thinking she would ponder this notion some more.

The discussion on goal setting was interesting with some participants wanting lofty goals while others had much smaller ambitions. The key here seemed to be people not sure how they would achieve a big goal and not wanting to fail. On the finance side, one thing stood out to Tony that Wayne mentioned, 'Money arguments are rarely about money; they are about security, freedom, and values.' He heard it, believed it but felt it needed to be explored some more to be able to understand it more fully.

One of the participants mentioned that they had seen people in their family plan finances well, while other didn't those who didn't on getting their superannuation blew it on bad investments, holidays etc and were left penniless, while those who had planned their

finances more had a better grasp on the foundation value of finances and had prospered nicely.

A few scenarios were explored, with fictitious couples setting up bank accounts and how things might go, exploring what could happen if various challenges were presented along the way, a redundancy here, a maternal health break there and so on. It was clear that a decent financial plan was imperative.

Wayne invited the finance guy to present a ten minute section on investment types, strictly with a non biased view on which he preferred, it was to strictly be an educational device to assist participants to explore some more on their own. His slideshow gave a good rundown, participants were pleased, many picking up his business card at the break.

Following on from that was a session on budgeting, participants were given a pdf file they could download that was a fully blown budgeting form with lots of details they could explore. Two methods were then discussed, using the budget in a detailed way or looking at what cash was left at the end of the pay period and setting the budget to spend only that amount of money.

One of the key things was recording, in detail what you spent, every detail... Totalling up the amount spent and then exploring what things were vital, then things that were maybes and then niceties but not vital. By the next catch up a number of questions would arise about money, what was vital to one person was not so vital to the other. Wayne suggested that people should be rather cautious and aim to not upset the other person, 'See it as a starting point and carefully outline each dollar spent, share the details at a time when the both of you are not going to be distracted. And respect each other's views on what's vital and what's not.

Alice heard about a facebook page that was set up for this course, it was unofficial and you could only join if you were part of this group, not some random outside. She joined and encouraged Tony to have a look as well, she wanted to know if it was of decent value or if people were wanting to have a 'whinge' about things, although she thought that would be difficult, Wayne had been so professional throughout.

The Facebook group turned out to be useful with some added insights and thoughts on the concepts presented with links to other resources that helped to explain aspects of the

topics further. Some shared their budgeting journey and points where they were shocked at what their partner spent. Some found their partner lied about what they spent. Another person found out their partner had a big chunk of cash stashed away in a paypal account, out of sight and out of mind. He would order things then have them sent to his work address.

The next course session came around in a hurry for some reason. The pair spent some time together in between, chatting and reviewing the course material right from the beginning. Something that had been recommended right from the start by Wayne. Each recalling different details and things said by participants and referring to the Facebook group from time to time.

Chapter Seven

The next session was titled, stepping into their shoes. There was the usual buzz at the start, although there were some severed nerves amongst some partners, the budgeting exercise of recording all the details pushed some people out of their comfort zones, some were pulled up by their partner for spending too much on gambling, having a hidden bank account, having expenses show up from companies whose bank statement details didn't match to their trading names.

Then there were others who opted to use the alternative method, see what was left and call that their savings.

Wayne got things started, he sat on his bar stool in the middle of the stage and looked out across the sea of faces scanning each person slowly. One of his assistants, Nat, came down to the front through the middle aisle, she did a slow and deliberate march with the theme from Jaws, the movie, playing. Wayne continued to scan the faces, with a blank scowl if that's even possible.

Nat wore a strap on shark's fin on her back. She arrived at the front and stood poised to write on one of the flip charts. Wayne then stood up and said, 'Good evening folks, I bet there are some people wishing they didn't come last week, and some who wished their partner didn't come last week!' He then explained that budgeting is for some a major challenge and for others a walk in the park, but experience has shown that at this point in proceedings

people's relationships can be strained. 'Nat's here to hear about the challenges you faced and some of the issues you may care to share, specifically about the budgeting exercise... GO!'

Nat wrote the main points on the flipchart, fitting in as many words and statements that she could. 'Hubby would listen,' - 'We forgot to get receipts for everything.' - 'We ran out of money.' - 'Our interest on our credit cards is crippling us.' - The list went on, It's hard, It's too revealing, hubby won't tell me where the money goes, I don't know how to stop buying shoes, our fuel bill is way too high, I now have sleepless nights, our mortgage is bad news, our kids seem to be eating the money! And so forth, the list extended to two flip chart pages.

The crowd clapped as Nat took a bow, the music started again as she went back down the back of the room.

Wayne ran through the list, pointing out that this is where most relationships come unstuck, arguments about finances. 'It's easy to see why, many of these things are connected with the non-negotiables we explored earlier on in the course, and getting to the point of communicating and understanding why your partner won't budge on some things is probably vital, for others not so much, they want to keep that secret.'

Wayne set out the guidelines for the next step in this process, recognising that there were a range of issues around finance and budgeting that needed a LOT of time to explore, he then suggested that they break into groups, not with your partner... and 'Explore what's on the flip charts and listen carefully to the issues people raise, someone take notes about the issues, solutions etc and see what shows up. GO!'

There was a time limit given, basically Wayne would wander the room and roughly measure when people were running thin on ideas. Then give a countdown for thirty seconds left and head to the front of the room.

Nat appeared again and took notes on the other flip chart of the points raised. Wayne then had brief discussions about the findings, pointing out the positive points on the list and ways that people could solve some of the issues, 'Maybe swap to the other budgeting method, maybe respect the other person's wants and needs.' the list went on.

Wayne pointed out that the last exercise in the groups required a fair amount of listening and individuals carefully negotiating possible minefields of emotions. ‘Most of the groups were actively listening and exploring points of clarification, most doing it very well.’ This neatly fitted into his main topic for the evening, communication. Active listening was the first step, a slide came on the screen, as Wayne talked through what active listening meant. A handout was passed around by the assistants.

The topic explored some more on the second slide. Then came a pivotal moment. Wayne outlined that what they were about to do was an important exercise in exploring their partner and a vital piece of discovery. Two assistants came to the front of the room with a chair each, the chairs were positioned about three metres apart, They then sat facing each other, Wayne went on to explain, they would sit facing each other for a set time, it was thirty seconds, but they were not told that. The aim was to not show any emotion, giggle etc. He recognised that it could be challenging for some. At the end of the time a bell would ring, they would then move their chairs closer and repeat the process, they would hear someone say, ‘Start,’ and the bell again at the end of the time frame.

‘Finally you will end up after doing this four times the last time you will be about 100mm away from each other. Note, as you do this your gaze should be on your partner, you can look respectfully at their whole body but we suggest a focus on their face by the time you get up close and personal. Oh and you are to say nothing...and set your chairs up so you don’t actually face any other person directly. When I say go, get set up and be ready for my command to start, COMMENCE!’

People shuffled about awkwardly at first with the assistants roughly guiding the distances apart. ‘The command came from Wayne, ‘START!’ Some found the exercise awkward, some found it easy, some found that it got a little harder as they came closer. Each time they reset their positions the time frame was lengthened by five seconds and then ten seconds.

At the end they turned their seats to face the front as Wayne then debriefed on the findings, ‘What did you notice?’ The responses were slow to begin with. Some noticed their partners eye colour, their breathing, their smile, and the list went on. Wayne then reviewed the most obvious points and how people became less anxious and more attentive as the process went on. He then asked about the time frame, a number of people said the time was

shorter at each change, Wayne pointed out it actually got longer. That interested a lot of people.

It was then mentioned that the activity was actually an intimacy session, a 'non sexual,' intimacy session. It can go deeper than just eye contact obviously, but in this case it's just eye contact. It can lead to other things though, holding hands, hugging, and cooking a meal together. I think that's about it, but hey perhaps you can think of some other 'intimacy things' beyond the scope of this information, right?' Wayne smiled as he walked off the stage.

The break came next a little later than usual due to the finance section taking up some more time than usual.

Alice asked a few people, who had expressed that they were annoyed with their partners about their finances, how they now felt after the last exercise. Some had relaxed quite a lot, one was still fuming, her partner gambling a lot more than she was comfortable with.

The music to return came on. Soon seated, the group were interested in what would come next. He had two assistants at the front of the room both with microphones, they worked through a communication exercise as an example. Wayne explained what they would be doing. 'One person speaks about a personal experience for two to three minutes while the listener gives undivided attention. The listener must then repeat the main idea and feelings back in their own words, without inserting any judgment or advice, while listening they are not to interrupt. That's what we're aiming for but let's start with this... Take it away Nat'.

Nat gave an animated chat about a personal experience, the 'listener. Andy, made limited eye contact, checked his watch, had a scratch and moved about. The presentation was hilarious, the crowd chuckled.

The pair then did the exercise properly following Wayne's guidelines, after Wayne asked for feedback on what the pair did that did not fit the active listening criteria.

The exercise then went as planned, with Andy actually asking for clarification at the end and nodding in agreement at appropriate points. Again Wayne ran a debrief, exploring what the pair did right this time. Fielding a range of responses from the audience. Wayne then

asked if anyone had a story they might share with the whole group and have their partner listen actively. One couple agreed.

Pat and Holly put their hands up, and took over the front seats and began, the audience then provided feedback on how well they did, and then a few points to consider for improvement. Wayne asked the group, 'How far apart do you think they should be for optimum results?' There were a few responses, a few people suggested that some would be comfortable up close, while others said not so close.

Andy and Nat reappeared as Holly and Pat returned to their seats, this time they did a similar exercise but the listener kept interrupting the speaker with suggestions and value judgements. Wayne pointed out the Listener was only listening to respond, not listening to process the information first. They repeated the exercise and then the listener asked the speaker if it would be okay for them to provide some feedback? Wayne pointed out the permission process and then explored. 'What if the speaker said no, they didn't want any feedback?' The audience had a few responses, from, 'The listener needs to respect the speaker's request,' to, 'They should have pressed harder.'

A handout came next with some key points on positive communication.

Positive Communication

Relies on clarity, empathy, and active engagement. Key points include **active listening**, focusing entirely on the speaker without planning your response, **open body language**, making eye contact and avoiding crossed arms.

Here are some other key points:

- **Empathy:** Acknowledge the other person's feelings and validate their perspective before jumping into problem-solving.
- **Constructive Framing:** Focus on solutions rather than dwelling on the problem, and offer genuine compliments to celebrate others' strengths.
- **Open-Ended Questions:** Ask questions starting with 'how' or 'what' to invite meaningful and clarifying dialogue, rather than yes/no answers.
- **Clarity and Brevity:** Be concise and avoid unnecessary jargon or filler words to ensure your message is easily understood.

The overall aim being to get clear information about what the speaker is saying.

Another handout came soon after Wayne read through the first one, and added a bit of depth. The second one had other points to help the process.

Key Statements to Encourage Positive Communication.

Focus on asking open-ended, curiosity-driven questions that validate the other person's feelings. This shifts the dynamic from defensive reacting to collaborative problem-solving.

These specific phrases can be broken down as follows:

1. Understanding & Empathy

Use these statements to show you are actively listening and to make the other person feel safe sharing their perspective.

- 'I want to make sure I understand where you're coming from. Can you tell me more about that?'
- 'It sounds like this has been really frustrating for you. Do I have that right?'
- 'I hear what you're saying, I have been in a similar situation?'
- 'I appreciate what you're saying, it sounds like it was frustrating, is that right?'

2. Collaborative Problem Solving

These statements invite the other person to share solutions, making them a partner in the conversation rather than a target of critique. [

- 'What do you think is the best way to move forward?'
- 'How can we work together to solve this?'
- 'What do you need from me right now?'
- 'What do you want from me right now?'
- 'I hear what you just said, how can I assist you to solve it?'

3. Safety & De-escalation

Use these to soften tense moments and check in on emotional states.

- 'I value our relationship and want to make sure we're on the same page.'
- 'Is this a good time to talk, or would it be better to discuss this later?'
- 'Are you up for a chat right now or later?'

The session wound up with a solid question time about anything that had been covered about these topics. The discussion went back and forth then things wrapped up, Wayne suggested that during the next week, that the participants respect, use empathy and compassion in their communication. Alice and Tony were keen to explore what came next.

An Email came next, that night as it happens, from Wayne, it was a survey on how the course was going so far, it was then followed by another email that had an attachment. The instructions said, print and explore BEFORE the next session. The information started with a

very short story about a couple. It then had a bunch of questions about the story, this led on to another story about building rapport. There was then a link to a 'private' session on Wayne's website where a video is presented on 'building rapport.' It showed a range of methods and explained the background science behind rapport, what it is and how it works.

It provided examples and indicated how important it can be in positive communication and respectfully influencing people. It finished by saying, 'In the next training session we will see how many people read the information in the email and how many then followed on to get this far. Have a fab week everyone!'

Alice read out the email to Tony on their way home, and by the time they got to Alice's place she had watched the video and read the attached document. Tony read it when he got home, curious to see what it was all about.

Chapter Eight

The pair worked on the exercise provided, it was all about observing how others communicate and how people who knew each other well would automatically alter their communication style to match to the other persons style, mannerisms, pace of talking etc, the more you observe this in other people the more you get to understand how they connect.

The next session started as per usual, but this time people who had read the info and watched the video were observing how people interacted. The entrance music kicked in and participants did their thing. Wayne asked about how things were going and any questions that he needed to respond to. There were a few comments about the previous session on Positive Communication.

There were even a few observations in the workplace where people were able to influence people better to do tasks as they felt that they were listening to others more effectively, really actively listening and then how that impacted the other person and their responses.

Wayne asked who read the email that was sent and then who watched the video? Not all hands went up... Wayne smiled and said, 'sometimes you have to pay attention to the details to get ahead...' He then gestured to the back of the room, Nat and Andy came to the front of

the room and had a casual chat, both using active listening skills, they then did what is known as Matching and mirroring the other person as they spoke, micro gestures, body language and even actual language typology to make the conversation happen.

The pair stopped and Wayne then stepped up and pointed out the things they had done that added to their 'rapport', he then asked for someone from the audience to read what was on the handout emailed through that outlined what rapport is. *'Rapport is a harmonious, empathetic connection between people characterized by mutual trust, understanding, and smooth communication. When you 'have rapport' with someone, you are in sync, feel comfortable sharing ideas, and relate to one another effortlessly'*

Wayne then shared, 'If you didn't download the document and get that information, there are printouts of it we will now provide.'

A couple of assistants distributed the documents to those who didn't print it out. Meanwhile Andy and Nat did some synchronised movements to some background music, then the music altered and they danced merrily up the aisle waving to the participants.

Another handout was presented, this showed some other visual examples of rapport. The handout had the following text at the bottom of the page. 'Synchronizing your breathing with someone else, known as **isopraxism** or **pacing**, is a powerful, non-verbal way to build subconscious trust and connection if done effectively. By matching the rhythm, depth, and location of their breath (chest vs. belly), you create physiological harmony that helps them feel naturally safe and understood.'

Wayne then provided a few examples of people breathing and how a listener might match that to put the person at ease, and perhaps even lead them to calm down if they are breathing fast for example. Rather than saying what you want them to do, just provide an example of what you want them to do, take a deep breath and show them a big solid breath and then match to theirs and then slow yours down.

A video of two people interacting showed more examples. It was pointed out that doing all of this helped people to understand the other person better, and gauge if they were angry, anxious, annoyed, happy, sad etc. Couple this with understanding and empathy and you have a winning combination around leadership, and better understanding.

A further handout was given on pacing and leading. And how it might work, Nat and Andy came to the front again and gave an example of how that could work, one person setting a pace, the other person would then match to that and lead them towards another pace, in the first instance one was talking fast, the other's aim was to get them to slow down without telling them to slow down but instead leading by practical actions. Talking fast to match the talker at first and then in progressive steps slow things down.

Wayne pointed out at various points how and when the transitions took place. Andy and Nat gave a few other examples to cement the idea for the participants. They then did an amusing three second dance routine and then merrily skipped down the centre aisle on the way back down the room, waving as they went. The participants clapped out of amusement, thinking, 'What would Nat and Andy do next!?'

Wayne mentioned that after the break they would explore 'growing together.' He then gestured in an open sesame style for the doors to open and they magically did.

Wayne launched in the second half session with a handout being distributed as the last person sat down. Wayne read out the top section.

Growing together, while being independent. Acknowledging differences and similarities. 'Me time' is not a rejection; it is fuel for connection.

He then added, 'Not everyone will see things your way... Explore the differences and respect them. Use the platinum rule, *'Do unto others as they want to be done unto.'* Get mindful about that.'

Compromising, I want this, and I want that. How to compromise. Compatibility isn't about being identical; it is about managing your differences with grace. Lets call them 'Niggly Naggly's'. It's the small things that annoy us. Leaving the lid off the toothpaste, not putting the soap back into the soap holder, not charging their phone, leaving the car unlocked and the list goes on...

There was then some space where participants could jot down the small things that could annoy them.

Healthy compromise means nobody loses; it is about finding a third way forward together. The group got to share examples in small groups, the aim being to explore what sorts of things people might compromise on. Wayne called the groups to order as Nat came to the front and started to write down on the flip chart the sorts of things people had just shared. There was then some discussion about each thing.

Wayne then went back to an earlier statement, 'The platinum rule.' and then added some depth to it, comparing it to the golden rule from the bible, 'Do unto others as you want to be done unto.' he noted the difference and then explored how it could fit in building lasting connections, respect and trust.

He then pointed out how it could be a part of being mindful and then produced a slide with a simple statement.

'Mindfulness is the basic ability to be fully present, aware of where you are and what you are doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around you. It involves paying attention to the present moment without judging or over-analyzing the experience.'

Wayne then invited people to clear the room, the chairs were moved out of the way for an exercise, Nat and Andy came to the front through the crowd. Wayne moved out of the way as the pair talked about and then demonstrated what the exercise would be. 'Move around the open space with the aim of being mindful that you don't bump into anybody, but move about the room not in straight lines. zig zag about and cover as much space as you can until you are told to stop. Oh and don't speak...'

The pair moved about each other, demonstrating what to do. They then invited the participants to do the exercise as Nat and Andy moved through the crowd, to the back of the room, the music 'Let's Dance' by David Bowie faded in. After about a minute Wayne called out stop! He mentioned how people had to be very conscious in the beginning about not bumping into people and then as they continued on it became easier.

They continued but with the extra guideline of moving incredibly slowly, this time, missing the others, but also being very mindful of sights and sounds around them, raising careful awareness of their presence in the space.

This continued to very slow soothing classical music in the background, for about ninety seconds. 'Stop.' A quick discussion then started about what people noticed. They were then invited to find their partner, and they would then move in unison, arm in arm, but again, not running into each other.

Ambient lounge music played as the couples moved about, arm in arm. Andy and Nat joined in helping to set the slow pace. 'Stop!' Then there was more discussion about the findings, how most couples were walking in unison, left foot, then right foot in unison as if the connection was already there.

The exercise over, the chairs were reset and the participants heard from Wayne with his closing remarks, things that were noticed, thoughts expressed, and then an exploration into 'If you were to create 'mindfulness' exercise, what would you do to make you more aware of you and your surroundings?' Nat was at the flipchart and readily jotted down people's responses. Ideas started to flow, Waking meditation, meditation in general, the face to face communication exercise, One foot balancing for thirty seconds, then swap to the other foot. The group were invited to research mindfulness and come up with a few other ideas, then share those on the Facebook page.

Wayne pointed out that there were 3 C's of mindfulness. Curiosity - Calm - Compassion. He then asked, 'So what's the point of being mindful?' Nat continued at the flipchart ready to jot down more thoughts and ideas. At the end of that Wayne added in, 'The point of mindfulness is to train your brain to stay focused on the present moment with openness and without judgment.' He then asked ... 'But what's the benefit for us, in building positive relationships?'

A slide came up with the following. 'Mindfulness in relationships means staying fully present with your partner and observing *your* emotions without judgment. It helps couples navigate conflicts by replacing automatic, defensive reactions with compassionate

understanding. Research also indicates that practicing mindfulness reduces stress and may significantly boost relationship satisfaction.'

Alice invited Tony to a mindfulness walk in a local park, It was a bright sunny Saturday, the pair wandered across the grass to an open space, they walked side by side at a regular pace, and then turned and repeated it slowly. Alice had researched mindfulness a little further on the computer and added in a 'twist' 'Now lets do a slow walk, but backwards.'

At first it was challenging and a few giggles erupted, Alice then suggested they walk side by side in a circle backwards. She then asked Tony what he had noticed as they did the walking, 'The sounds of others playing in the background, the grass brushing against my runners, the breeze, the cirrus clouds in the sky... And what about you Al?' Alice smiled, she loved being called Al, sometimes as 'Alice' seemed so formal at times.

She then replied 'Well Tone...' Watching to see if Tony would react negatively to being called 'Tone,' instead of Tony, but he just smiled and glanced her way. 'I certainly felt the breeze and now that you mention it the clouds, oh and the people in the background. But the main thing was how I had to concentrate hard at first and then things became more automatic after a while.'

Tony agreed, especially walking backwards, then in a circle backwards. He looked at Alice and suggested they embrace and share a waltz, 'Just for the hell of it, no judgement about how good or bad, but just a chance to be mindful together, not apart. Alice shrugged her shoulders, then Tony pulled out his headphones and let some music play out of the speakers, and for a short while the pair moved across the grass to the amusement of some people walking their dog. The dance soon turned into a hug, filled with smiles from ear to ear.

It was now time for lunch, a cafe nearby offered some options, the pair sat and chatted about this morning and then the course, then work issues and finally what's happening at home. Both felt very connected by the catch up today, holding hands as they headed back to the car. Tony said, 'I wonder what's next?'

Tony didn't have to wait long, the next course session came around in a blink, or so he thought. It was actually a few days but his mind was on many of the things they learnt along

the way, he compared different people at work, watched how others communicated, listened carefully to instructions and paraphrased statements to get clarity on discussion points. It was as if a whole new world had opened up for him.

For Alice, things were a bit different, she had been given less reception duties and more customer liaison and trades coordination, it required some more thinking and communication skills but now she felt like it was going to be easier with the training she and Tony were doing. Her boss noted how she handled customers and phone calls and didn't know much about what was different but he liked the level of professionalism she showed.

Chapter Nine

Our happy couple walked into the next training session full of confidence and intrigue, on the way over they both gave each other equal time to chat about work, the time passed quickly and before they knew it they were there.

This evening's session was on Personality Types, followed by how to explore manipulation.

The music picked up, participants filed in, then a recap of how things had gone since they last caught up. Wyne then walked off the stage as some music came on, andy and Nat came down to the front of the room, a slide went up on the screen, 'People who are like each other, like each other...'

Nat stood at one flip chart and Andy at the other, both wrote what was on the slide, neatly rehearsed, 'People who are like each other, like each other...' The pair put down the pens in unison, walked to face each other in the middle of the stage, then turned and faced the crowd, they then said out loud, in unison, 'You don't have to be like each other to be in a relationship, but it helps!' They then skipped down the aisle.

Wayne came back up onto the stage, cheering the pair on as a handout was distributed.

The heading was 'Personality Types'

Often referred to as Emotional Intelligence, is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage both your own emotions and the emotions of others. It is a critical skill for navigating social complexities, building healthy relationships, and achieving personal and professional success.

The Four Domains of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is commonly broken down into four core competencies: [1]

- **Self-Awareness:** The ability to recognize your own emotions and understand how your feelings, strengths, and weaknesses impact your thoughts and behavior.
- **Self-Management:** The skill of controlling impulsive feelings, adapting to changing circumstances, and managing your emotions in healthy, constructive ways.
- **Social Awareness:** The capacity for empathy—being able to understand the needs, concerns, and emotions of other people and pick up on emotional cues.
- **Relationship Management:** Knowing how to develop and maintain good relationships, communicate clearly, inspire others, work in a team, and manage conflict.

Why EQ Matters

While your Intelligence Quotient (IQ) is helpful for academic or technical performance, emotional intelligence is often a stronger predictor of leadership success, overall wellbeing, and mental health. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are typically better equipped to handle stress, defuse conflicts, and foster collaboration.

Wayne explained that some personality type guidelines were super heavy duty, he favoured a ‘street smart’ method, created by a guy from the Bronx, Tony Alesandra.

The next handout showed the four types according to Tony, Relator - Socialiser - Director - Thinker.

Wayne then discussed each type and related how they created ‘starting points,’ for discussion and evaluation, and that each was contextual, some people being more of one style at home and perhaps slightly different at work. In each category he pointed out some of the traits, Directors being direct and often goal driven, Thinkers needing details and data, relators being team and family oriented. Then socialisers being social... There was then some discussion about who in the room related to any of the particular types, some having their partner point out that so and so is like this one or that.

Wayne reiterated that having knowledge about personality types was all about ‘starting points to understanding.’ He then pointed out that flexibility is the key, being able to adapt to different types in different situations to be able to ‘connect’ with people. You could be yourself, of course, but exploring being flexible in your approach, noting things they do that show their ‘typology,’ could be useful.

The break time saw a lot of discussion about personality types, there was mention of family members, customers and friends and how different and or similar they could be. The music picked up and they were back inside. The music changed after the first twenty seconds or so to ‘Sweet and Sour.’ a popular song from the eighties. Its chorus mentioned ‘I am in control, life can be sweet and sour, but I am in control.’ After that played, the music faded.

A slide showed the heading, ‘Controlling Types.’ Wayne sat on the bar stool, it was in a slightly different position although most people probably didn’t notice. He started to talk about how some people, both personally and professionally, wanted to have power and control, so things would go their way, probably, ‘Their way or the highway.’ The big thing is, there is possibly no one with these traits who would sign up for this course, they don’t want their partner to know anything that might change the way they want things to happen. Therefore they want control, they probably take control of a number of things and before you know it, you are following on, not wanting to upset things. Here’s a bit of a list on this next slide.

Things they want to control... ‘YOU!’

- What you do.
- Who you do it with.

- What you buy.
- How you look, fashion, hairstyles etc.
- Where you can go and when.
- The finances, if you did have a bank account they probably got you to close it and have just one account that you don't have control of. If you have a superannuation account they want to know how much is in it.
- Your goals.
- What you watch, what you read.
- How you do things, like cleaning, folding clothes, cooking and so much more.

There was some discussion, people pointing out people they know who have a partner like that. The next slide pointed out some aspects of controlling types

Controlling types

To control their 'partner' they might use Coercive Control...

- Gaslighting - They do things to cause you to question things, you start to doubt your own thoughts, they can readily deny things, 'No I never said that...' You start to question what might have been said, after a while you don't tackle them about issues instead you become passive and follow their beliefs, it just becomes easier that way.
- Manipulation - Monitoring your behaviour during the day, multiple text messages, multiple phone calls, using guilt as a control mechanism where they make you feel bad from the guilt they project on to you.
- Love bombing - The relationship starts out with gifts, dinners out, holidays and so on, until things get serious and then you find they turn out to be different and sometimes, not in a good way. They have you in the 'Palm of their Hands.' You want to please them and so you start to give up some of the things you loved doing, then before you know it you may well be trapped.

- Positive communication requires active listening and validation over winning arguments. People interested in power and control want to win, sometimes at all costs...
- Persistent badgering is a form of control that borders on bullying, basically it's harassment, nagging to get a result, not necessarily the result that both people want.

Common Boundary-Pushing Behaviors

When someone continually pushes limits, they often employ specific, repeating patterns of behavior. Understanding these signs can help you identify when social or personal lines are being crossed:

- **Testing for loopholes:** Asking repeatedly for 'just this one time' exceptions after you have already said no.
- **Minimizing your feelings:** Dismissing your discomfort with comments like, 'It's not a big deal' or 'You're overthinking this'.
- **Interrogating for control:** They interrogate your reasons for having a preference, aiming to find a weakness in your argument so they can retain control. It's a form of manipulation.
- **Over-apologizing to wear you down:** Repeatedly violating a boundary and then following up with dramatic apologies to make you feel guilty for being upset. A sometimes common phrase might be. 'I'm sorry but...'

Ways to Respond Effectively

When you are dealing with someone who doesn't respect your limits, experts emphasize that consistency is your most powerful tool. Here are a few ways to reclaim your space:

- **Use a hard 'no':** Avoid soft rejections or over-explaining, as ambiguous answers are often taken as a green light to keep pushing.
- **Call out the behavior:** Explicitly label what they are doing. Say something like, 'I've asked you to stop doing that, and it doesn't feel like my boundaries are being respected right now.' Or. 'You're not trying to make me feel guilty right now are you?'

- **Walk away:** If your boundaries continue to be ignored, the most effective response is often to disengage entirely, and limit contact with that person.
- **Change:** If you think you can change someone who might be coercive and controlling, think again, friends and family may advise you to stay away from them, but you think you can change them. The likelihood of that happening is exceptionally low.

Alice and Tony complete the course, stepping into the world with a resilient, conscious partnership, built on a deeper level of trust than they thought possible. Wait, what? The course ended, oh... was there a party? Or some form of celebration? Yes, yes there was, but it was a fairly low key affair. Most of the participants were happy with what they had learnt and were seeing big improvements in their relationships. What, did you expect something different? Tony and Alice were doing very well with it all, thanks very much.

‘But how long would it last?’ Greta queried? Alice asked why she thought that? Did she see something in Tony that she didn’t see? Greta, shrugged her shoulders, Frank came into the room, he had overheard the conversation. And piped up with ‘Al, I think it’s simple, she’s jealous. Now hear me out before you guys go off half cocked, you and Tony have had an amazing opportunity presented to you, you took it up, soaked it up and are in a brilliant position, compared to so many people from our era. Lot’s of us struggled and were challenged often, for some too often.’

Greta nodded, she agreed, ‘Now that you mention it, yep I am a bit jealous, dad’s right, you are off to a flying start, and if you can both follow the guidelines and concepts properly you will do quite okay.’ Alice smiled, then a long conversation began, exploring the mistakes her parents and some of their friends had made along the way. Some it was pointed out had a sour relationship for years, however they wanted to wait until their kids had become old enough to stand on their own feet before the parents separated.

Alice sat and listened with interest, adding in some questions here and there for clarification, the chat went on for some time. Arguments, often over silly things, then disagreements when a decision couldn’t be made over a purchase, like a piece of furniture or new carpet. Frank suggested that a lot of compromise took place, but it took him a long time to learn it, and longer to implement it. ‘For you, the best chapters are probably unwritten.

You may find, like I did, there are beginnings, middles and ends to things, a few steps to go out to the garage to get gardening tools, a few more steps to take the things into the garden and then some more steps to do the gardening itself and then the pack up, more steps. In its entirety it's a big task, but broken down into sections, each has a beginning, middle and then an end. As was famously said; The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.'

Alice and Greta looked at Frank in a quizzical way, then both said, almost in unison, 'Go Mr logical!' Then Greta asked for clarification about how his 'wisdom' fitted into the earlier conversation? Frank thought it was all logical and fitted in quite well, the girls didn't agree so much. He did his best to explain, but the girls felt he failed miserably.

Chapter Ten

The jovial atmosphere post event, eventually settled, giving way to a more tranquil stillness within the lounge. Alice glanced towards Tony, finding that familiar, unwavering stare he had maintained since their initial encounter, though it felt transformed now. The frantic energy of a fledgling crush had matured into a solid sense of mutual understanding.

'Frank's points hit home, in their own way,' Alice remarked, shattering the quiet. 'The training is behind us, but we've only just crossed the starting line.'

Tony gave a slow nod, reaching to clasp her hand. 'Spot on. We've collected the tools, the active listening, the awareness, and the money strategies, but the actual construction of our future is up to us.'

That following weekend, the pair decided to put their new skills into practice. They embarked on a slow, mindful trek through the local gardens, no digital distractions, just pure connection. They didn't treat the techniques as mere homework; they focused on *them*. They explored their upcoming goals, the minor 'niggly naggly's' that surfaced, and how they would navigate the inevitable friction of their first real dispute.

It wasn't a flawless, cinematic sequence. Tony took an unexpected tumble over a garden sprinkler, and Alice ended up with mud on her trousers, which triggered a bout of laughter that lasted until they reached the vehicle. But that was the core lesson. They were fully

present. They were listening. Most importantly, they were smiling through the hiccups rather than letting walls build up between them.

As time progressed, the 'Wayne Plum' methods became almost instinctive. When a disagreement regarding holiday finances emerged, they didn't resort to badgering or withdraw into silence. They implemented their three-account plan, used empathy to grasp each other's security concerns, and crafted a solution where both felt respected. When life felt overwhelming, they leaned into mindfulness, using those deep, deliberate breaths to check in before reacting.

They came to see that their connection wasn't a final stop; it was a living, breathing entity. It demanded constant care and maintenance. It meant showing up every single day, not as a controller or a passive bystander, but as a dedicated teammate.

One evening, while resting on the veranda watching the light fade, Alice retrieved the booklet from that very first night. She turned the pages, now scattered with their personal notes, sketches, and shared revelations.

'Think back to that first session?' She asked, resting her head against Tony. 'When we figured we were just signing up to learn how to pick a film without an argument?'

Tony smiled, pulling her closer. 'I reckon we picked up a fair bit more. We figured out how to be 'us'.'

Alice stared at the remaining blank pages, the ones devoid of expert data or corporate branding. They were wide open, waiting for their own unique chapters to be written.

'So,' she mentioned, closing the cover. 'What's the next step?'

Tony gave her hand a firm squeeze, a quiet gesture of solidarity. 'Whatever we decide it should be.'

And with that, the genuine effort began, the process of living, learning, and loving, one step at a time.