

Love Yourself

By Marlene and Bob Neufeld

Our Experience

We started out deeply in love. We remember staying up all night sharing our excitements, challenges and visions, laughing together, touching each other and wanting to be in each other's company. You know the feeling of really being connected? That was us.

Then the usual stresses of life came along: Bob got his first full-time teaching job and was working 60 hours per week, and Marlene gave birth to our first child. Under these new conditions, something changed in our relationship. Marlene didn't feel confident in Bob's love and began to withdraw emotionally. In response, Bob tried to reach out to Marlene, but his approach was in many ways ineffective.

We were focused on the logistics and problems of our new situation instead of our excitement about our developing life together. When challenges came up, we looked for who was to blame. We lost sight of our visions, and laughter became infrequent. Our feelings of anger, fear and sadness became suppressed, but came out in blame, criticism, judgment or walking on eggshells with each other. We no longer felt the urge to touch and connect, and we felt too tired to make love spontaneously.

Finding What Was Lost

We would, occasionally, take time together. We had periods of brightness and connection and our friends thought we had a great relationship, but we knew something was missing. We each had feelings and thoughts that we believed we couldn't share with each other. Even after our two boys grew up, we didn't return to the excitement of our beginnings: by that point, we had so many layers of withheld thoughts and feelings that we didn't think there was anything new to find out about each other. Our relationship consisted mostly of emotional flat-lining, with occasional out-of-proportion blow-ups and extended silences.

Somewhere deep in our hearts, though, like you, we knew there was more. We knew that there was a possibility of more fun, more connection and more vibrancy in our relationship.

We want to share with you one of the key relationship skills that turned our relationship around so we laugh more, touch each other more, and experience more fun and joy in our relationship.

Love Yourself As You Are

If only we had known when we first met that the first and most important thing we can do to have a happy, thriving relationship is to drop the habit of self-blame and judgment, and love ourselves exactly as we are! This has been *the essential skill* in our relationship, upon which all the others have been built.

Before we learned this skill, Marlene was in the habit of self-blame and judgment. She had a strong inner critic and believed she could never be enough for Bob, to the point where she was unable to accept his love. Outwardly, Bob seemed to love himself; in fact, Marlene would occasionally accuse him of being too full of himself. But Bob believed he wasn't doing enough or being good enough, and he would habitually seek approval from others. We thought that we needed self-criticism and self-judgment to improve and grow.

Over the last fifteen years, we have gradually let go of our habits of putting ourselves down and have focused on our own inner beauty and innate perfection. We have let go of seeing ourselves as improvement projects, and instead have begun to see ourselves as appreciation projects.

A number of years ago, Dr. Kathlyn Hendricks (www.hendricks.com) told us that **self-flagellation is optional!** We learned that self-flagellation (beating yourself up) is not only unnecessary, but is harmful to your health and to the health of your relationship as well. It is a detour that takes up unnecessary time and energy, and blocks creative energy. Self-blame and self-judgment keeps us from being open, keeps us from learning and growing. We have learned that growth comes only when we are able to love and accept ourselves as we are.

Before you deal with your relationship problems, you first have to feel okay about yourself. And this is possible even in the most difficult situations.

If your relationship is stressed, turn your focus away from everything about your partner and your relationship that is wrong, because these are NOT the keys to growing a thriving relationship. The key is not to focus on what's wrong, but rather to place your attention on what you can appreciate, starting with yourself.

How We Can Help

There are, in fact, specific things you can do, with or without your spouse, to make things right in your relationship. We know from experience how difficult it is to truly learn to love and appreciate yourself no matter what. If you would like to learn more about how we can help, please email us at info@marleneandbob.com or call us at 613-594-9248 to arrange a complimentary one-hour coaching/therapy session by phone or in person. If you would like to sign up for our complimentary series "13 Ways to Connect with your Lover" go to www.marleneandbob.com.

We'd like to close with words of inspiration from two of our teachers, Drs. Gay & Kathlyn Hendricks (© 2002 The Foundation for Conscious Living www.hendricks.com):

Love yourself exactly as you are
and you are forever changed.

Love everything you can
from wherever you find yourself.

Think of someone you love a lot
& love yourself that much.

When you forget how to love yourself,
love yourself for forgetting.

Jump from logic into the safety net of love.

Open your love big enough to
hold all your feelings.

Love others exactly as they are
& they are free to change.