

P A R T 1

# *R*eclaiming Your Personal Power



*First we form habits, then they form us. Conquer your bad habits, or they'll eventually conquer you.*

-Dr. Rob Gilbert

# *M*ake Love Not War



*That old law about an “eye for an eye”  
leaves everybody blind.*

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

*You know how unresolved* conflict can erode your relationship's well-being? Trapped in a cycle of arguments, debates, rationalizations, and justifications, the goodwill that once existed between you and your partner slowly but surely begins to slip through your fingers. Somehow your adeptness at debate and blame takes on more importance than your ability to love and support.

Procrastination, thoughtlessness, irresponsible behavior, even deception begin to take up more and more space in your relationship. You both agree that therein lies the problem. "If only you would do what we agreed upon..."

"If only you would be nicer to me..." "If only you would be more understanding..." "Why don't you ever think of me?"

And so you both willingly retrace each other's footsteps, none too happy to point out the fallacy in the other's thinking or actions. Implied in all of this is the solution for creating a great relationship that sounds something like this, "If only you would do, act, or think differently, then I would..."

Your partner explains, "It's just my nature." Or "You're making too much of this." Or you may have been told before, "You're being too sensitive."

But it feels so very much more than that to you. It feels mean-spirited, almost punitive. You can't quite put your finger on it, but at times you know there's much more to it than your partner's absent-mindedness. You can't help but think that when you talk about it, there's more left unsaid than said.

The longer the arguments go on, the more the walls go up. Where once there was a foundation of trust and respect, now there's only distance, if not total disconnection. Sadly, it seems that the rare times you do feel connected are the times when the two of you are fighting. Sure, nothing ever gets resolved, but at least for the tiniest of moments there's a spark, a shred of connection.

Your friends shrug their shoulders and say, "You know, relationships are hard work." Hey, hard work is one thing, but this relationship has begun to feel like a chore—a dreaded one at that. Where your relationship was once a port of safe harbor from everything else that life would throw your way, you now are seeking other places of refuge to escape the drudgery of your relationship.

Once full of happiness and hope for a brighter future, you suddenly feel stuck in a quagmire of ill-will and blame. Your hope for a supportive and nourishing relationship has begun to evaporate before your eyes.

And the scary part is you feel powerless to do anything about it. You recognize the patterns because they've happened before. Yet, the patterns seem to have a grip so tight you can't escape their clutch. Spontaneity has been drained from the relationship, replaced by a rote script the two of you willingly stick to.

You know each other's responses by heart. Resignation begins to replace the will to fight. "What's the use, I know what she's going to say," or "Why bother, he'll only get back at me in some other way if I say anything."

It's clear that something has to change. No longer can you easily convince yourself that it's always the other

person's fault. Oh sure, you're not ready to let go of the notion that things would be better if your partner would just *get with the program*.

Perhaps an inkling of awareness is beginning to break through—some glint of recognition that you are responsible in part for the conflict that exists in your relationships. And if that's true, then there's an important lesson you need to learn. After all, if you've contributed to what the relationship has become, you're just going to keep repeating these patterns wherever you go, with whomever you are with.

The good news is there's a process that you can learn that will enable you to begin to make molehills out of mountains. By mastering this process, you'll discover the joy of reclaiming your personal power in all of your relationships. By using some very simple relationship skills, you'll begin to create long lasting harmony with the people who matter most.

You don't have to say good-bye to your dreams. Relationships no longer have to be sabotaged because you don't know how to break out of a never ending pattern of conflict. There are very simple means available to empower yourself in lessening the amount of discord between you and your partner.

As you master these simple skills I'm about to share with you, you'll immediately notice how much better you'll feel about yourself and your partner. A sense of hopefulness and well-being will replace the gray cloud that hangs over your relationship. You'll rediscover how good it feels to be with your partner. A sense of openness and freedom will begin to replace the self-protective walls that have left you feeling so alone.

Just imagine how good it would feel to see your partner again as a friend, lover, and confidant, rather than the enemy. You need no longer fear *being made wrong* every time you say, think, feel, or do something. Sanity can replace what was once only hurt, anger, betrayal, and rage.

Sound too good to be true? Don't question any of it for even a moment. I'm going to show you some simple steps. These steps can transform many of the booby traps in your relationships. You'll begin to see problems as opportunities to enrich your relationships by developing stronger connections with the people who matter most.

As we go through this journey together, you'll discover an incredible vein of riches. For this is not merely a how-to book that outlines a series of techniques to mechanically apply to the conflicts in your relationships. Rather, this book will illuminate a path of personal empowerment—the means to reclaim your personal power and enrich your emotional and spiritual well-being. This path will be illuminated by the glow cast from your process of self-discovery.

As a result of reading this book, you'll discover more about who you are. This process of self-discovery will shed light on how your unarticulated aches and pains appear in your relationships. As a voice is given to all of those unacknowledged aches and pains, you'll discover what their true source is. And as a result of your self-discovery, you'll develop a better awareness of the choices you have when those aches and pains begin to overwhelm you and, ultimately, the well-being of your relationships.

That's my wish for you, that you have a menu of choices. The knowledge that you no longer have to suffer silently as your relationships become mired in a cloud of

never-ending futility. Simply put, this book is a testimony to the power of healing that comes from your willingness to exercise different choices in order to resolve the discord in your relationships.

Little by little you'll begin to see you and your partner's behavior as something more than mere forgetfulness or thoughtlessness. You'll begin to appreciate how often a word slipped in here, an action perpetrated there, are not mere innocent slights.

You'll discover how your actions are embedded in a mosaic. A mosaic that expresses the larger picture of your emotional hurt—the pain that you feel but do not express for whatever good reasons you may have.

Finally, this book is a testimony to the emancipation you can create by mastering the simple relationship skills that will transform how you and your partner work together to build a stronger relationship. Your freedom will emerge from a new found sense of empowerment born from the seeds of self-confidence and self-love. These are the seeds that will give birth to the far more fulfilling tomorrows in your life.

*No* More Skillet Calling  
the Kettle Black



*Kindness can become its own motive.  
We are made kind by being kind.*

-Eric Hoffer

*Our relationships are the* foundation on which our emotional and spiritual well-being is built. Meaningful, cooperative relationships are the cornerstone of an emotionally healthy life, rich with purpose and love. And you know, these kind of relationships don't just happen, they're created. They're molded and shaped, crafted and nurtured. Strong connections are crafted by two people who believe that the rewards far outweigh the risks of getting close to one another—the risks precipitated by two people forging a bond woven from the strands of emotional honesty, emotional intimacy, and emotional vulnerability.

This bond is woven with the use of special tools—specific relationship skills. These relationship skills enable us to repair, maintain, and nurture the well-being of our relationships. These skills bridge the gap between mistrust and trust, misunderstanding and understanding, self-centeredness and empathy, and hurt and forgiveness.

If you asked Judy what impact the relationship skills she learned in her Relationship Bridge-Builders group had upon her life, she wouldn't explain it the way I would, but she could say it far more eloquently. Judy would simply say, "I learned how to love and be loved."

Far less technical, yet far more poignant than anything I could have come up with. For Judy that was the essence of what had changed for her—the ability to love and be loved. So much of her life had been spent keeping the world at arm's length. Never letting anyone get close enough to care about her. Never opening herself enough

to somebody else to care about them. No, Judy had fabricated her own safe place in the world, never believing that it could ever be any different.

But all the hurt and disappointment that came with her involvement with the people in her life had been magically transformed. Transformed from fear and mistrust to self-confidence in her ability to cope with the inevitable difficulties that arise in any relationship. No longer did she feel a prisoner to the ebb and flow of her relationships, a rhythm that so often left her feeling powerless and out of control.

Judy had rediscovered her voice, of equal importance the means to articulate her emotional needs at those times that she was feeling most depleted. For so long, fear controlled her willingness to say out loud what she needed from another person. Too many times she had been laughed at, met with judgment or anger, or worst of all, totally ignored.

Judy had finally said good-bye to the days of her simmering anger. Those were the days when resentment had consumed her as she gave and gave while her emotional needs were left to twist in the wind. The red hot embers of anger were slowly replaced by the brilliance of an emerging inner glow. This glow was given birth by Judy's willingness to boldly put herself out there.

No longer content with being a good sport, she had discovered a place within herself that enabled her to feel entitled. This entitlement fueled her courage to slowly but surely invite people into her world who would honor her voice. A voice that proclaimed her rights as a person. A voice that empowered her to no longer settle for the *status quo* in her relationships.

No, if you asked Judy, she would look you right in the face and tell you flat out, “The *status quo* was forbidden.”

But Judy could also tell you that it took more than a new attitude to make a difference in her relationships. You don’t just wish something different and then it’s so. That’s certainly how it begins, but that’s not where it ends. Judy discovered what you’re about to discover—reclaiming your personal power in your relationships requires a lot of know-how. Your *willingness* to create the kind of relationships you desire is the first step. Step number two is *creating a better awareness* of who you are and how your personal issues appear in your relationships. Step number three is *learning the relationship skills* that can emancipate you from the current patterns of confusion and self-sabotage in which you continually find yourself ensnared.

And so it is that this book is dedicated to the proposition that *you too* can learn how to love and be loved. Your relationships don’t have to burn out like a white hot comet that initially glows so brightly, but eventually crashes and burns. Maintaining the passion in your relationships is not a passive process. Anyone, let me repeat, *anyone* can learn how to sustain the well-being of their relationship. You simply need to better understand how your relationship gets stuck. More importantly, you need to learn how to navigate beyond the rocks in the choppy waters on which your relationships run aground.

## Getting Beyond Good Intentions



*All worthwhile men have good thoughts, good ideas,  
and good intentions, but precious few of them  
ever translate those into action.*

-John Hancock Field

*What are the circumstances* in your relationship that bring you to your knees? Those circumstances that never seem to change, in fact many times, trying to change them only makes matters worse. Does the word *powerless* come to mind—a feeling so pervasive it overloads your emotional circuits? Feeling totally ineffectual. Anything you do or say has no impact. Nothing seems to make a dent. The spirit of cooperation that once existed between you and your partner has been replaced by the corrosive cycle of blame/defend, accuse/justify, attack/retaliate, and finally, withdraw/punish.

Is there anyone who hasn't experienced that familiar feeling of frustration over and over again—frustrated that you and your partner just can't seem to get beyond what keeps the two of you bound in knots. You've talked it to death. Ignoring it only makes you feel worse. You've tried to convince yourself that you just won't care about it anymore, but that's like seeing how long you can go without inhaling.

How well does any of that work for you? It's unlikely that any of those strategies are very rewarding in the long run. Why? It's likely that you aren't using the relationship skills that can easily enable you and your partner to stop hurting each other.

It's my most fervent belief that much of the pain that you experience in your relationships can be alleviated if you master a few simple skills. Quite simply, there are specific skills that you can learn that will make relationships less conflictual, if, you're willing to use them.

Let me emphasize that last point. You *must* be *willing* to create relationships with people that are dedicated to *resolving* rather than *perpetuating* conflict. Sadly, not all people are *willing* to surrender the emotional benefits they experience from being in a conflict-filled relationship. But I can tell you this much. Even if you're willing to be in a conflict-free relationship, if you don't know and use the skills necessary to keep a relationship open and growing, you'll find your best intentions undermined.

So the first point I want to make is that you need more than *good intentions* to create relationships that are nourishing. There's a very simple saying I have, "You must work differently at your relationships, not harder at them." If all you do is continue to try and solve the challenges in your relationships the same way you always have, then you will continually get the same results.

For many of you, the skills that I'm going to discuss with you will create different outcomes than those of your old strategies. Learning these skills can change the way you and your partner respond to each other. By changing the way you respond to each other, you can insure a different outcome than you are currently experiencing.

So the first step towards ending the discord in your relationship is *resolving to do things differently*. It's likely that some of your old ways aren't working. But I promise you, there are new skills that can get you over the hump.

Now it's not enough that I believe this. It's not enough that I can see the benefits of mastering these simple skills. You need to be able to see what's in it for you. So let's stop and think about this for a moment. How will you benefit by learning a different way of responding to



merely familiar. Don't settle for the comfort of what you know best, venture into the realm of the new and unknown. I realize what I'm asking of you. But if you can just hang on to your belief in the benefits that you listed above, you'll feel less unsure of yourself and more encouraged to venture forward.

As you embrace the formula I've just suggested, you'll begin to notice subtle changes. Your fear will lessen. Your confidence will increase. Those old ways will be less seductive as you discover you have more and more choices. Ultimately, you'll discover that the more choices you have to resolve the conflicts in your relationship, the more empowered you'll feel. And believe me, there isn't a better gift in the world that you can give yourself.