

THE RELATIONSHIP HOUSE

APPENDIX N

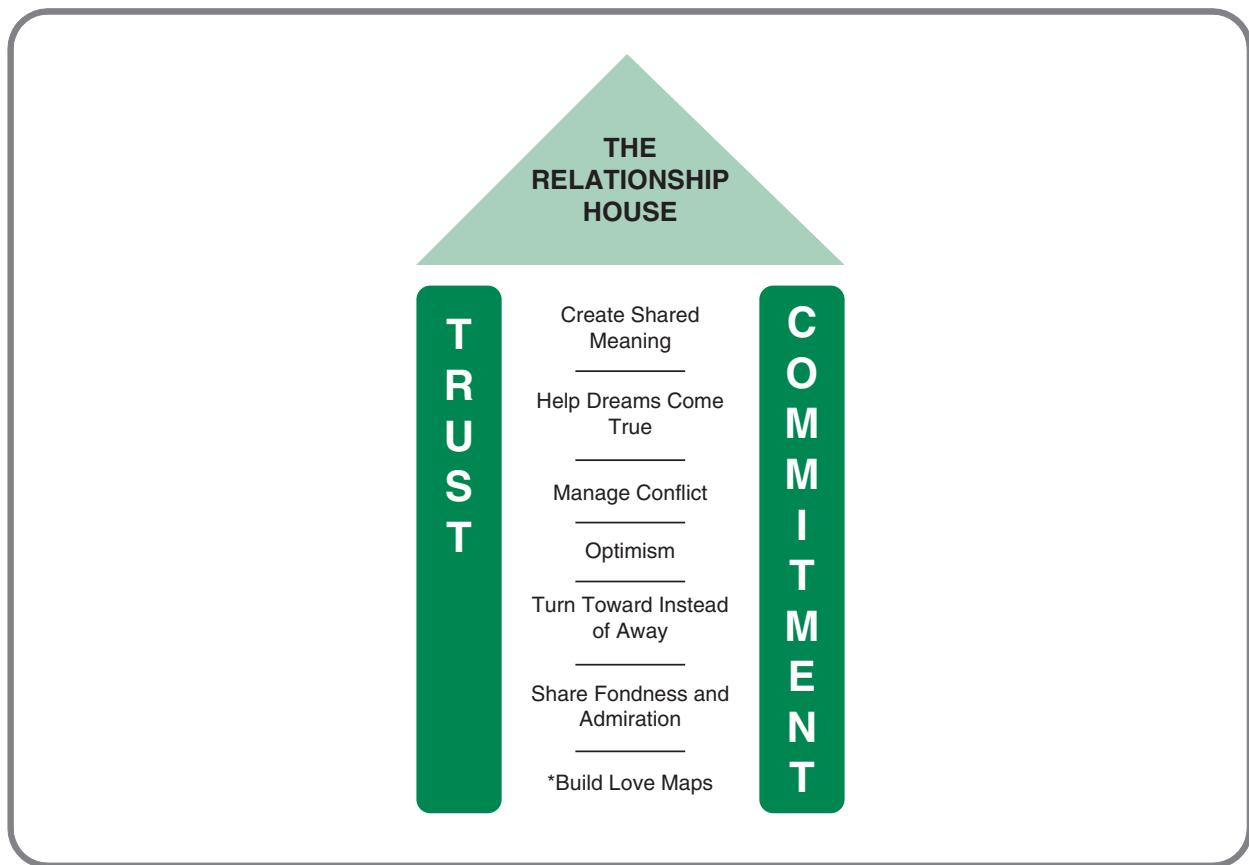
A few years ago, we were tasked with developing a co-teaching practice at a high school. Co-teaching is a model where two (or more) educators attempt to tackle a curriculum with a group of students together. Our particular situation involved coordinating a special educator in Language Arts with a general education teacher in Language Arts. The goal? Improve accommodations and modifications of the curriculum for all learners.

Naively, all we did was adopt a co-teaching model and held monthly meetings with the teachers in an attempt to implement co-teaching. Essentially, we put two educators together, shared basic principles of co-teaching, and expected them to thrive. As you may have guessed, we failed. By the end of the school year, the two educators were not on talking terms.

Licking our wounds and acknowledging the less-than-ideal performance of students, we needed a new approach. We felt co-teaching had promise; we just weren't executing it very well. The feedback we garnered from our "guinea pig co-teachers" had less to do with learning targets and more about supporting one another's goals.

Their feedback triggered a memory from a group counseling course we took in graduate school. In this course, we surveyed many forms of group counseling including families and couples. One of the most evidence-based methods of counseling couples came from the Gottman Institute. We had a thought: What if we applied Gottman's couples counseling to co-teaching? This was one of those thoughts where we initially laughed, but it also made us think more deeply. The deeper we dove into the idea, we fundamentally agreed that relationships were at the center of co-teaching. We found co-teaching wasn't just about improving their capacity to work together, but to care and respect one another deeply. So many things co-teachers are asked to do are more intimate than you may realize. They must share the same space over a long period of time. They must face stressful events together. They must work toward a common goal from different perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences.

Well, we hope you get the idea. Working together is about taking our relationships seriously. If we're going to take relationships seriously, we've got to consult the wisdom from the research and evidence base of the Gottman Institute. The following tools and resources come directly from the Gottman Institute's foundational concept known as "The Relationship House." We found that introducing these concepts with teams has helped them grow closer and troubleshoot when things are slipping.



The two most stabilizing components to any healthy relationship are our ability to maintain trust and commitment. The best way to conceptualize trust and commitment is to consider when they are absent.

When we don't have trust, we feel defensive and less likely to take risks. When we don't have commitment, we feel alone and as if we don't matter. In contrast, when we have trust, we are more likely to take risks and "leaps of faith" with one another. When we have commitment, we feel connected and like we matter.

Once we have trust and commitment, we can engage in "furnishing our relationship house." The following are the "furnishing activities" we can take to build relationships with our team, our students, and everybody else.

Furnishing Step 1: Build Love Maps (Feel Free to Change the Name)

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It all begins on the firm foundation of knowing each other. In the first level of the Sound Relationship House, partners build what Dr. John Gottman calls a "Love Map," which is the essential guide to our teammate's inner world. What are their likes and dislikes? Who is your partner's best friend? Did they have a happy childhood? How do they prefer to relax after a tense day? In an ideal relationship, you and your teammate know each other better than anyone else.

Furnishing Step 2: Share Fondness and Admiration

Everyone needs to hear something nice about themselves, and it means a lot when it comes from a teammate. Sharing fondness and admiration sounds like vocalizing the characteristics that you appreciate. Perhaps you admire their sense of humor or the way they're always willing to help someone in need. In healthy relationships, you can articulate the big and little reasons you admire your teammates.

Furnishing Step 3: Turn Toward

When we need attention, support, and comfort from our team, we are likely to say something or make a gesture to elicit a response from them—what the Gottmans call a “bid.” We should do our best to turn toward a bid when they reply with what we need. Consistently turning away (or, worst yet, turning *against*) a bid spells disaster for any relationship. When we recognize and turn toward each other's bids, we create a safe space for our team to express their needs.

Furnishing Step 4: The Positive Perspective

The best teammates see the best in each other and don't rush to offense or criticism. So when a teammate rushes out the door and doesn't say “good-bye,” a Positive Perspective means we give our teammate the benefit of the doubt. We can safely presume they were preoccupied rather than intentionally negligent.

Furnishing Step 5: Manage Conflict

Since we can't avoid conflict, knowing what to do when it inevitably shows is key. First, we need to accept our teammate's influence, meaning we take their feelings into account instead of doing everything our own way. Second, whether problems are solvable or perpetual, we dialogue about them.

Furnishing Step 6: Make Life Dreams Come True

The beauty of a healthy relationship is that we have people who will not only encourage us in our goals but also help us reach them.

Furnishing Step 7: Create Shared Meaning

The top of the Sound Relationship House functions much like its foundation of Love Maps, except on this level, we build and understand an goal as a team. The Gottmans think of it as developing a culture of symbols and rituals that express who we are as a team. It can be as simple as getting coffee from a place the team loves every Friday as intricate as the unique way you celebrate birthdays. These rituals of connection define us as a team, and we create them together.