



Learn to Love Letter

What to do when my partner says: "No!"

Tutorial 1

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1 Why a tutorial?

An insight we might admit to from our personal as well as our professional world might be that:

Partnerships do not collapse because of a lack of love but rather from a lack of knowledge. If we knew more we would make them work better.

Does that seem too easy? Perhaps, but it is easy to agree that we all want the same things, i.e. happiness and contentment - especially in a partnership. But how can we achieve them? When we look at our families and friends we can't help but be shocked at the number of separations and divorces. Moreover, many couples who do remain together do not give the impression of being particularly blissful. Why is this the case if everybody longs to be contented?

Could it be that some of us never learned how to be happy in a partnership? After all, how many of us had the opportunity to consciously prepare for a partnership or indeed for married life? In an age of specialization, society does not have a single specialist institution that we might consult when it matters - i.e. before we commit ourselves. A lucky few of us have role models, but how many of us have ones that are really useful?

We believe this model might be. We would like to **invite you** to work **your way** through it - alone, **with a friend, or with your partner**. This tutorial could give you knowledge that would enable you to change the quality of your partnership and to make it more secure, more relaxed and happier.

Partnership, love, family are the themes that affect our personal lives. Talking about these themes means having to get personal i.e. talking about things that mostly remain in the private sphere.

We intend to talk about personal matters. Each tutorial is built around three sample relationships. We have created them from the multitude of stories that have been lovingly shared with us in our professional lives. Some points from some of the stories we have heard are reflected in the samples. However their circumstances have been altered in such a way that nobody's individual story can be recognized.

You might feel that the stories depicted in the examples are exaggeratedly simple. That is the intention. We believe it is beneficial to use sharp contrasts in order to clearly demonstrate the efficacy of altering conditions. The stories are not intended to be great literature but rather working papers. The representations of common situations with their potential for sudden conflict are intended to demonstrate the universality of one's own problems, i.e. that they are "normal."

The seemingly simplistically harmonious solutions depicted in the second part are an envisioning of one of our fundamental beliefs; i.e. that apparently small modifications in our dealings with each other can have dramatically positive and happily permanent consequences.

Occasionally, you might recognize a slightly altered story in a later tutorial, which treats an apparently dissimilar topic. The reason for this is: depending on the particular point of view, a further issue (conflict) might come to the fore. Relationships, like communication networks, are very much intertwined.



Learn to Love Letter

We invite you to learn from the experience of others - as we always have done and continue to do. We invite you to share your experiences and insights with us and with others. To facilitate this, we have created a guest book where you can ask questions but also respond to the questions of others who are working with the tutorials. Perhaps it will be your idea that will make the difference in somebody's life.

But who are these other people? We think they are people like you: People who take their relationships seriously enough to want to improve them: People who believe they themselves and their relationships can be improved: People who are prepared to take advantage of the Internet - to learn - with and from others: People who value flexibility. We believe this offer is equally useful to men and women, young and old, to young people in relationships that feel old and to older people who want to reinvigorate relationships that have gone cold. As in all our projects, we are assuming that you agree with us on the fundamental equality of men and women. This conviction is reflected in the language we use. The statements usually apply equally to either gender.

From our point of view, such tutorials are an optimal method to work profitably on one's own relationship at one's own pace. The first 14 tutorials deal with the basic rules of how to deal with conflict in the partnership in such a way that a relaxed relationship can be established.

Let us agree on something else. Conflict is a normal part of every relationship. They will arise anew and will have to be solved anew. However, neither our upbringing nor the role models in our societal environment have ever been of much help in either resolving existing conflicts or avoiding new ones.

We rarely meet people who can be of real help with the specific issues we need to successfully resolve or who can tell us how or why to make a specific move.

To help overcome this problem, we have created an overview of the tutorials. This will help you identify the tutorial, which contains the topic that is important to you right now. It makes more sense to begin with the topic you and your partner have identified as most relevant to you regardless of its sequence in the list of tutorials. Search it out together and work through it together. Simply doing this with your partner is an important step in improving your current situation.

What does it mean if you cannot identify any success? In our experience, change takes time. Another factor is the length of time we have already used to get used to an existing pattern of behaviour. This applies even when we intellectually recognize that; "this isn't working and we have to make changes." Even then, the power of habit plays a role. The longer we have taken to form a habit, the longer it may take to (re-)form it.

If time has passed and there is still no success, it might be because there is an unconscious "objection" to your achieving success, contentment or happiness.

We will be dealing with this question from tutorial 30 onwards (expected in the 3rd quarter 2010)



Guide to the tutorial

- Based on several real-life examples. Examine the structure of partnership problems and thus recognize the source of hurt.
- Get to the philosophical basis of core problems by asking both serious and humorous questions.
- Learn problem-solving rules.
- Question these rules and in doing so, discover their importance. Recognize that breaking the rules will result in hurt.
- Look at the examples again through new glasses.
- Scrutinize the limits of the rules.
- Some tips on how to jointly apply these rules.

Tutorials 1 to 18 can and should be gone through in the sequence of your choosing. Tutorials 20 –30 are designed to deepen topics that have been previously addressed. They are most useful if you have already worked through the particular topic.

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2 Everyday challenges

Example 1:

Max wants to go to Majorca again with his mates. Maria doesn't understand him. Why does he want to go to Majorca without her and why Majorca anyway? He's been going there once a year for three years and she has kept quiet until now – although her displeasure had been plain to see. Until now she had been content to be “in a bad mood” for a while. However, she does not see the need to put up with it any more. She says: “Listen Max, I don't think it is nice for you to fly to Majorca and leave me here alone. I don't want you to go on holiday without me and especially not with your mates and especially not to Majorca.”

Although he truly loves her, Max likes to have occasional free time without Maria. He responds as follows:

“If you love me, you should not try to confine me like that. A relationship is not a prison. I should be able to spend a few relaxing days away without you making a big fuss of it. After all, they are my friends and you don't like them anyway. Listen, I have thought about it and I have reached a decision. I am going.”

He is a bit irritated because he can't do what he wants but even more so because he feels that Maria is criticizing him again.

On the other hand, Maria is hurt. Meanwhile, she has come to suspect that he wants to travel without her because he wants to cheat on her. Inwardly, she asks herself: “Do I want to remain with Max if he is going to behave like this?”

Example 2:

Julia is a typical Latino. She is very hospitable and always manages to create a warm, inviting atmosphere. She usually greets her male friends with a hug and a kiss. She sees this as quite normal. One should not read anything into it – she believes.

She has been married to Adrian for five years. It is his second marriage. One day Adrian sees one of her friends kissing her on the lips – with her obvious permission. He frowns and decides to talk to her about it. He does not think it is good. He thinks it is a touch too intimate.

When the guests are gone and they are clearing up, Adrian says: “Listen Julia, I saw you kissing L on the lips. I don't like it. Please don't do that in the future.”

Julia is aggrieved. What is Adrian's problem? Why is he upset over a little kiss that means nothing? Does he think I am going to cheat on him with L? How ridiculous! She sounds testy when she responds: “Sweetheart, it doesn't mean anything – don't let it bother you. It is just the way I greet people – nothing else. You shouldn't get upset about it – or do you really suspect something?”

Adrian does not respond. He feels misunderstood. Furthermore, it bothers him that Julia's reaction is so testy and that she had tried to placate him. Maybe there is more to this than simple cultural behavior.

Julia also notices that her assertion has not mollified her husband. However, she too remains quiet when he does not say anything. She feels she has been criticized. This uptight German mentality gets on her nerves sometimes.



Example 3:

Marius and Mona Smith have been married a long time. They have 3 children between 14 and 21. They and their children have a lot of friends. One day, their eldest daughter (21) brings a friend home. The girl, who is an only child, comes to love being in the big noisy house. As the years pass she becomes a member of the Smith family, even going on holiday with them. After some time, Mona notices that Marius has begun to treat the girl like his own daughter and increasingly champions her.

One day, some friends tell her that Marius was seen at the cinema with the young lady. Mona talks to him about it the following day and asks him to stop. He refuses to go into the matter saying he feels he has to look after the girl. In her own family, everybody does their own thing and she feels neglected. She misses the family feeling. He continues to meet the young lady whenever he likes. After all, she is a friend of the family and his daughter's best friend.

The subject is swept under the carpet. They don't want to turn it into a major issue. They don't want to upset the children or hurt the young lady in question by keeping her away from the family.

Time passes. Mona and Marius begin drifting apart. Mona feels neglected and disrespected. Marius is aggrieved and feels his honour has been attacked. "Nobody is going to tell ME what to do, not even my wife."



3 Some basic thoughts

Love and relationship – what does it mean?

Are you familiar with these or similar scenes?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>
Remarks:		

Is one allowed to put borders on the behavior of one's partner?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

Is my partner allowed to put borders on my behavior?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

Is it allowed to lay down rules to the partner?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

Would I allow my partner to lay down rules for me?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

Is one allowed to express one's expectations to one's partner or does this create unnecessary pressure?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

Is it not better that my partner fulfils my expectations voluntarily rather than in response to my demands?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

If I say "No" to something my partner is doing, does this mean I distrust him/her?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

If I say "No" to something my partner is doing, am I drawing a line and saying: "if you cross this line you will hurt me." Is this permissible or is it blackmail?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

Can a "No" be an expression of trust in my partner?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

How can I react to a "No" which affects my borders? (E.g. my partner says "No" to some activity, which is important to me.)

Are there "No s" which I cannot accept?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>

Before you read on: Please go through these questions together and as thoroughly as possible. Please imagine how a strong, sensitive, **loving couple** with a lot of **patience** and **compassion** would respond to them.

Give yourself lots of time before you read on.



4 The rule of love

**“No” will be respected
in our partnership.**

**When I say “No”
you don’t do it**

No means No!

The three statements have the same meaning: If one partner says “No,” the other accepts this and acts accordingly.

5 What this implies for the relationship

In the end, the atmosphere is more **relaxed** because everybody knows:

- I can say “No” if I am going to be hurt by my partner’s actions.
- When I say “No,” my partner won’t do it.
- In this way, we both respect our borders.
- In our relationship, we watch out for and respect each other’s borders.

Of course, this will work only if it works for both partners equally. If only one partner is prepared to apply these rules and the other refuses to, the following questions should be addressed:

- What do I gain by ignoring my partner’s “No?”
- How are my feelings towards our relationship affected when my “No” is not accepted?
- How do I want to deal with different points of view in the partnership?
- How did my parents deal with different points of view in their relationship?
- Do I desire a relationship based on equality?
- If yes, how would I recognize it?
- If not – why not?

Adhering to these rules is a further step in the direction of **trust** in one’s partner and thus in the relationship.



6 Renovating your daily life

Example 1:

Max and Maria.

"Listen Max, I don't think it is nice for you to fly to Majorca and leave me here alone. I don't want you to go on holiday alone and especially not with your mates and especially not to Majorca."

Max, who has just read this tutorial, decides to try out what he has learned. He responds: "OK, you don't want me to fly to Majorca without you. Would you like to fly somewhere else with me or what else would make you happy?"

Maria is surprised by Max's prompt acceptance of her objection. However, she is unprepared to answer him spontaneously and asks for two days to think it over.

She had not actually thought about what Max could do in place of his original plan if he were not to leave her alone. She immediately expresses her gratitude for his willingness to neglect his mates for her sake.

Max does not say anything. He is still inwardly torn about whether he ought to have insisted on getting his way. On the other hand, Maria is looking at him with a look of tender, fainthearted trust. She has not had an expression like that on her face in a long time. It makes him feel good.

Two days later, they decide on a holiday when they can both arrange time off work. They have chosen the south of Spain, which has sun and sand for Max and lots of interesting sights for Maria. Because the atmosphere is so full of trust that evening, Max feels able to tell Maria that he feels hurt by her vehement rejection of his friends. They may not be deep thinkers but they have been part of his life for a long time. Maria promises to think about it. Max is relieved and draws this conclusion:

Sure, he would have liked to hang out with his buddies but if push comes to shove and he has to prioritise, then he has to choose Maria.

This evening they have learned to talk to each other. In this kind of atmosphere, it will be possible for them to create space for his needs without the stress that such discussions used to entail.

Example 2:

Julia and Adrian.

When the guests are gone and they are clearing up, Adrian says: "Listen Julia, I saw you kissing L on the lips. I don't like it. Can you not do that in future please."

"Of course," she answers. "I was not aware that it bothered you so much. If you don't like it I won't allow them to do it. You are the man I love and I don't want to hurt you. A kiss from L or anyone else means nothing. Consequently, it means nothing to stop doing it."

Adrian is surprised. He had been expecting a passionate debate. He is happy. He feels that his needs are being respected and that he is important to Julia. He smiles at her and she smiles back. They have a wonderful night



Example 3:

Marius and Mona:

One day, some friends tell her that Marius was seen in the cinema with the young lady. Mona talks to him about it the following day and asks him to stop. Marius is dismayed. Does this mean that his wife still does not trust him? Does she misunderstand his motives after all these years of marriage? Or does it mean that his wife values the opinion of so-called friends over the need to be there and help a young person in their development? He would not have expected that of her.

However, despite the initial shock, Marius manages not to react immediately. He asks Mona to give him time to think about her request. Mona agrees. She is relieved that there has been no row. She is well aware how impulsive her husband can be when he feels his honour has been attacked. They sit down together that same evening.

Marius finds it difficult to talk about his feelings without attacking Mona. However, he has had time to think honestly about himself and his wife and has to admit that he has felt attracted to the young lady in question. He tries to express what is important to him this:

“I am really not sure why you are asking me this. I was of the opinion that it was equally important to you that X have the opportunity to experience what a warm, loving family life can be like. I have to admit I am somewhat annoyed but I will accept what you say. You have said “No” and that is it for me. I love you and know you would not demand something from me without good reason. However, I would like you to explain yourself to me in more detail. It does not have to be immediately. You don’t want it. It is important to you. That is enough for me at the moment and I would suggest the following. We will only invite X some time when we are both home and can do something together. Well, what do you think?”

Mona is moved. She had been prepared for and nervous of a major fight.

She feels her husband’s affection more than she has for a long time. Normally, both their lives are so full of activity. A natural bond of trust has developed but there is little time to demonstrate their love for each other the way they did at the beginning of their relationship. And now this! How wonderful that Marius can accept her saying “No” because she is important to him.



7 Exceptions and limits – even to love

What happens when my partner express a “No” which I respect but to which I cannot adhere in the medium term?

The couple will have a problem, which has to be solved, if one partner says “No” to something the other considers very important and which cannot easily be given up.

The following situation is an example:

He is divorced from his first wife with whom he has a 23 year-old son. His current live-in partner is jealous when he visits his son on birthdays etc, where he is likely to see his ex-wife.

How should he react to his partner’s “No?”

Discuss this situation with your partner and try to think of several possible solutions.

Solution 1:

Solution 2:

Solution 3:



Suggestion:

Adhering to the first rule “No means No” is a vital first step.

**“If you don’t want me to do it
I will not do it.”**

This decision confirms and stabilizes the relationship to the new partner. It shows her that she is important; that she will be listened to; that she is respected.

Nevertheless, in this case, the situation cannot be left as it is because the “No” will hinder an **important obligation**. The fact is, a parent remains responsible for his/her child even into adulthood. Such a responsibility entails having a living relationship to one’s child, keeping in touch with his/her development and knowing what makes them laugh or cry. It means sharing important moments with the child.

He might continue in this vein:

“However, I would like to know exactly what you consider to be important in this matter, i.e. my not going to his birthday party. He is my son and I do have obligations, which I must and want to fulfill. I’m sure you don’t want me to choose between you and my son so I suppose it is something else. Is it?”

He will want to **consult** with his partner because he cannot permanently renege on his obligations vis a vis his son. A mutually suitable solution, i.e. one they can both live with has to be sought and found.

Should the new partner continue to deny him his rights, he will have to choose between his obligations and his new partner. In making this choice, he will doubtlessly consider whether this is the partner he wants to share his life with.

This question would amount to a **conscious occupation** with the topic of separation **in full knowledge of where the problem lies**. Such knowledge prevents a separation occurring as the upshot of a long series of hurts arising from jealousy and the hard choice between love to his new partner and existing obligations.

Such obligations include children, or pre-existing contracts (job, financial etc.)

It is useful to discuss the following questions in order to have a relationship-oriented consultation in such a situation,:

- What exactly is important to you?
- What are your core values?
- What exactly would hurt you?
- I don’t want to hurt you. How do you suggest I fulfill my obligations without any risk to you?
- What is the best thing that could come out of this situation?
- What is not perfect yet?



8 Further thoughts

8.1 What could prevent us from living this rule of love

Our conscious or unconscious fears could prevent us from living the rules of love. For example:

The fear that I am basically

weak, powerless or even helpless

might force me to inwardly rebel against limitations to my well-being in order to demonstrate to myself and the other that I am not simply prepared to put up with everything: That I have learned to fight for what I consider important: That I am capable of looking after myself: That I don't just accept what life throws at me.....

Please discuss this and decide whether one or even both of you have or have had these or similar fears. Should that be the case, discuss whether these fears can be justified in the light of your love and respect for each other.

8.2 What helps us to live the rule of love

Regardless of what is preventing us from easily following this rule, we can still consciously consider the following questions:

- Do I love my partner?
- Do I want to allow some fear to play a major role in our relationship?
- Does love grow when I give or does giving make me poorer?
- Were we to add **empathy or compassion** to the expression of our love, wouldn't we be automatically more able to respond to our partner and his/her borders?

If you consider these questions along with further reasons you will doubtlessly be able to add, you will find that it is increasingly easy to accept and apply the rule. Allow yourself to be surprised.

