

# Learning to Connect Emotionally in Relationships the John Gottman Way

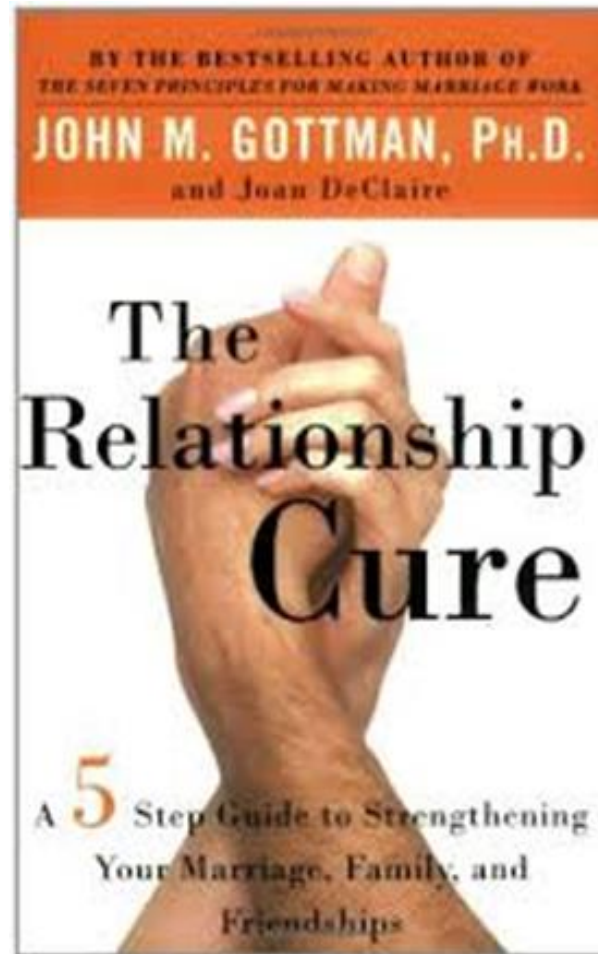
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**Louisiana Tech University**



# The Relationship Cure

## Dr. John Gottman



# Background Information

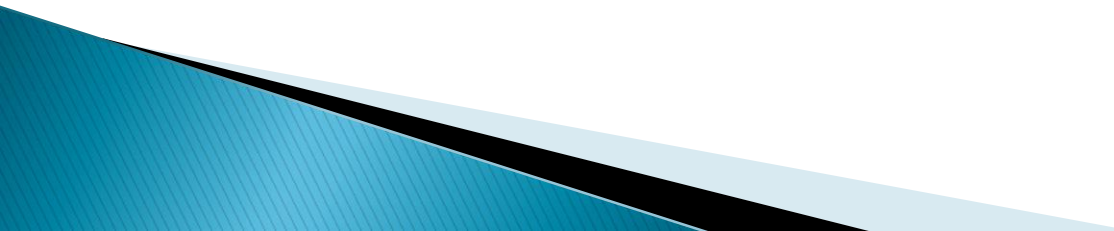
- ▶ Author of more than 190 academic publications and author or coauthor of 40 books.
- ▶ Dr. Gottman is highly regarded in the areas of marital stability, divorce prediction and parenting.
- ▶ Co-founder of the Gottman Institute, where he studies marital relationships



# Dr. Gottman's Background Cont'd

- ▶ Executive Director of The Relationship Research Institute, a non-profit research institute. Website: <http://www.gottman.com>
- ▶ Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Washington
- ▶ Founder of “The Love Lab” where most of his research was conducted on couples’ interactions

# Books by Dr. Gottman

- ▶ *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*
  - ▶ *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*
  - ▶ *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*
  - ▶ *10 Lessons to Transform Your Marriage*
  - ▶ *What Makes Love Last*
  - ▶ *And Baby Makes Three*
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# 5 Steps for Strengthening Emotional Connections

- ▶ Examine your bids for connection
- ▶ Discover your brain's emotional command systems
- ▶ Examine your emotional heritage
- ▶ Sharpen your emotional communication skills
- ▶ Find shared meaning



# STEP 1

**Examine your bids  
for connection**



# What is “Bidding”?

- ▶ Can be easy to see and interpret
- ▶ Difficult to understand
- ▶ Verbal or nonverbal
- ▶ Physical or intellectual
- ▶ Sexual or nonsexual
- ▶ High or low–energy
- ▶ Funny or serious
- ▶ The content could involve thoughts, feelings, observations, opinions or invitations



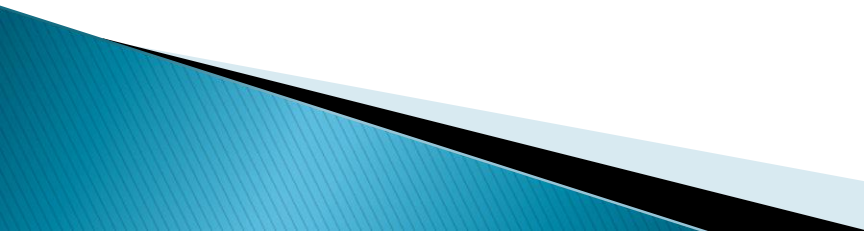


# Examples of Nonverbal Bidding

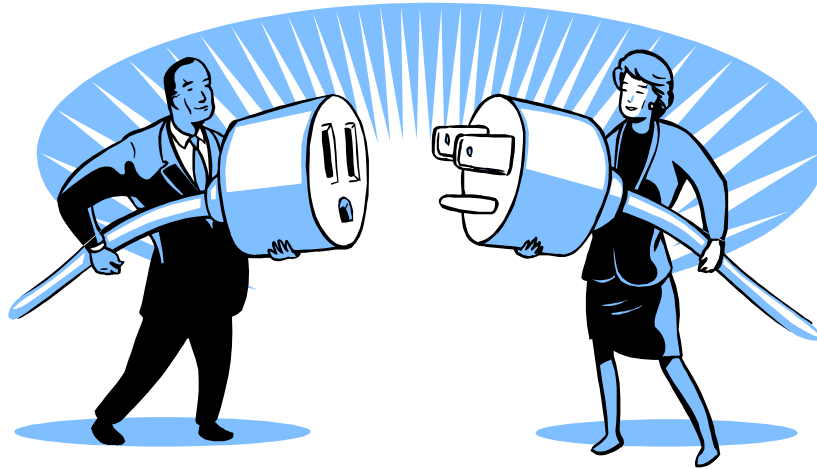
- ▶ Affectionate touching
- ▶ Facial expressions
- ▶ Playful touching
- ▶ Affiliating gestures
- ▶ Vocalizing



# How we respond to bids: (1 of 3 ways)

- ▶ Turning Toward–
    - React in a positive way to a person's bids for emotional connection
  - ▶ Turning Against
    - A person behaves in a hateful or argumentative manner; This type of bid usually involves sarcasm and ridicule
  - ▶ Turning Away
    - Ignoring another person's bid for emotional connection, or acting preoccupied
- 

# Example Scenario of Turning Toward



- ▶ Two coworkers are talking, and one makes a funny comment and the other laughs.
- ▶ A wife discusses her desire to take a vacation, and her husband agrees and says they should start working on a plan.

# Example Scenario of Turning Against

- ▶ A wife asks her husband to turn off the TV so they can talk about their happenings that day, and he sighed and said, “What is there to talk about?”



# Example Scenario of Turning Away



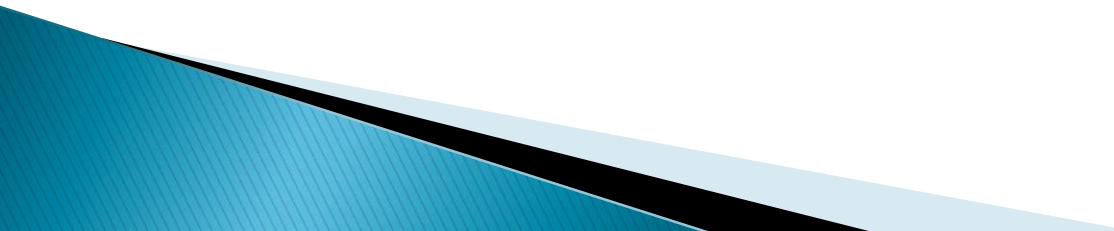
- ▶ A friend might say something to this effect, “Look at that sports car, I would love to sport a ride like that!”
- ▶ The other friend would not even bother to look up or respond to the remark, or he might respond with something completely unrelated, like, “What time is it?”



# Bid Busters

1. Being mindless instead of being mindful
2. Starting on a sour note
3. Using harmful words instead of helpful complaints
4. Flooding
5. Practicing a crabby habit of mind
6. Avoiding needed conversations

# Bid Buster #1 – Being mindless instead of mindful

- ▶ Being mindful is noticing other individual's bids and responding to them
  - ▶ Being mindful is being in the moment with someone, being present in the relationship
  - ▶ Become a collector of emotional moments
  - ▶ Set goals in your relationships
  - ▶ Consciously look for opportunities to connect with others
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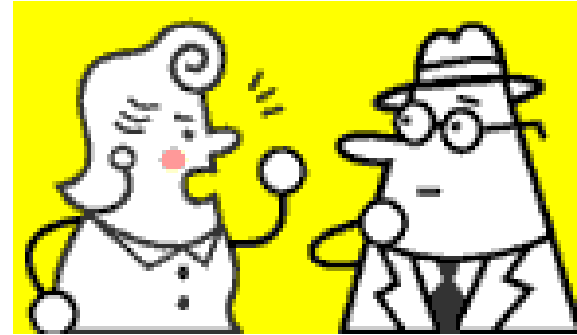


# Bid Buster #2: Starting on a sour note

- ▶ Start your bids on a softer note
- ▶ Begin with something positive
- ▶ Express appreciation and gratitude
- ▶ Start with “I” instead of “You”
- ▶ Don’t stockpile complaints
  - Try to address issues one at a time, or as they happen
- ▶ Revisit the episode later with that person



# Bid Buster #3: Using harmful words instead of helpful complaints



- ▶ Issue complaints when necessary, but not criticism
  - Complaints address a specific problem, criticism is more judgmental and personal
- ▶ How to appropriately issue a complaint;
  - State your needs; do not attack or blame the other person
  - Describe your complaint as your perception, not as an absolute truth
  - Focus on a specific behavior you would like to see changed, not on global judgments

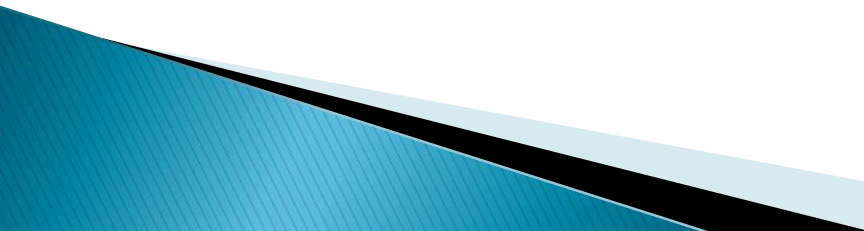
# Bid Buster #4: Flooding

What is flooding?

- ▶ When interacting with a person with whom you already have a strained relationship, additional conflict discussions may trigger intense emotions.
- ▶ The person becomes so stressed they become physically and emotionally overwhelmed



# What are some constructive ways to handle flooding

- ▶ Take a time-out from the conversation for at least 20 minutes and self-soothe (Take a walk, meditate, progressive muscle relaxation, read, etc.)
  - ▶ Do not think about the conflict during the 20 minute relaxation time
  - ▶ After 20 minutes have expired, either get back to the conflict situation or schedule another time to discuss
  - ▶ Exercise: Give the other person just one word to help them better understand your needs in the conflict situation
- 

# Bid Buster #5 – Practicing a crabby habit of mind

- ▶ Look around and find things and people in your environment that you appreciate instead of having a critical attitude
- ▶ Search for reasons to say “Thank You”
- ▶ Make praise and thanksgiving a habit
  - Keep a daily Journal of Thanksgiving, and attempt to write down several things, people or talents that you are thankful for each day

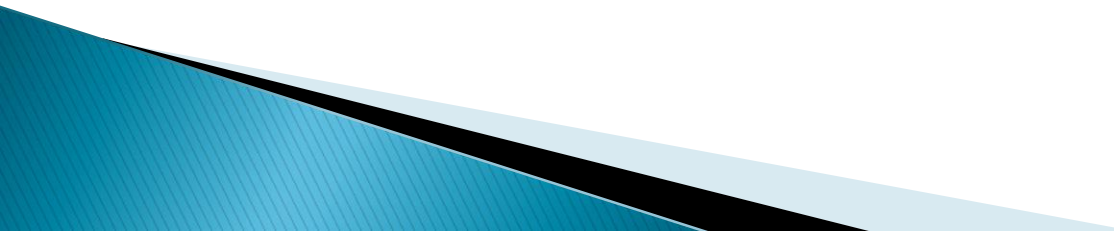


# Bid Buster #6: Avoiding needed conversations

- ▶ Many times arguments occur and resentments build due to a lack of communication
- ▶ If you are surrounded by conflict in a relationship, take a look at issues that are not being discussed



# 3 Ways We Respond in Conflict Situations

- ▶ Attack & defend
  - ▶ Avoid or deny
  - ▶ Self-disclose and connect
  - ▶ \*\*\*Derived from well-known psychologist Dan Wile
- 



# Exercise: Creating a Relationship Map

- ▶ An activity for spouses, parents, or friends to complete to better understand each other, which will facilitate emotional connection.
  - Answer the questionnaire as you think the other person would respond and circle any answers you don't know the answer to.
  - Go over the Love Map with the other person to gain the correct answers and share with each other.



# Exercise: Choose 5 questions and respond to your neighbor

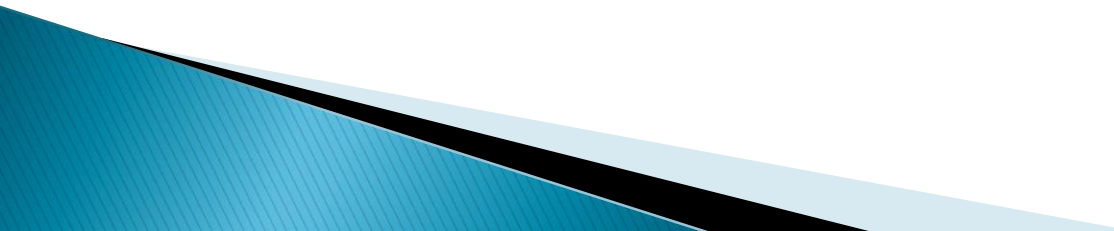
- ▶ 1. Favorite Meal
- ▶ 2. Special Hobbies or Interests
- ▶ 3. Favorite holiday
- ▶ 4. Ideal birthday present
- ▶ 5. Ideal vacation destination
- ▶ 6. Favorite TV shows
- ▶ 7. Favorite kind of animal
- ▶ 8. Favorite way to get over being sad
- ▶ 9. Personal improvements you would like to make
- ▶ 10. Best vacation you have ever had

**\*\*\*An excerpt from *The Relationship Cure* by John M. Gottman, PH.D.**



# STEP 2

Discover your brain's  
emotional command  
systems



# The Emotional Command System

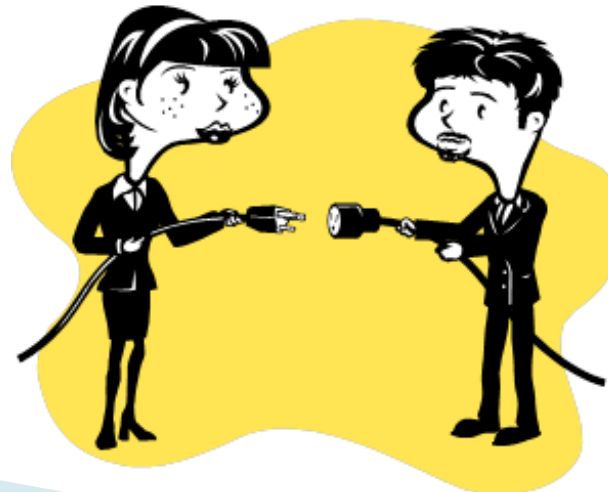
- ▶ Definition: Nerve-based circuits that coordinate electrochemical signals in the brain
  - Researchers have found 7 separate systems that are responsible for transmitting messages from 1 nerve cell to the next until all of the cells throughout the body are activated to carry out the desired service.
  - Panksepp (a scientist) first identified these command systems. He contends there are probably more.

# The 7 Emotional Command Systems

- ▶ The Commander-in-chief
  - Dominance, control and power
- ▶ The Explorer
  - Searching, learning and satisfying curiosity
- ▶ The Sensualist
  - Sexual gratification and reproduction
- ▶ The Energy Czar
  - Regulates need for energy, rest and relaxation
- ▶ The Jester
  - Play, recreation and diversion
- ▶ The Sentry
  - Survival- Relates to worry, fear, vigilance
- ▶ The Nest-Builder
  - Affiliation, bonding and attachment

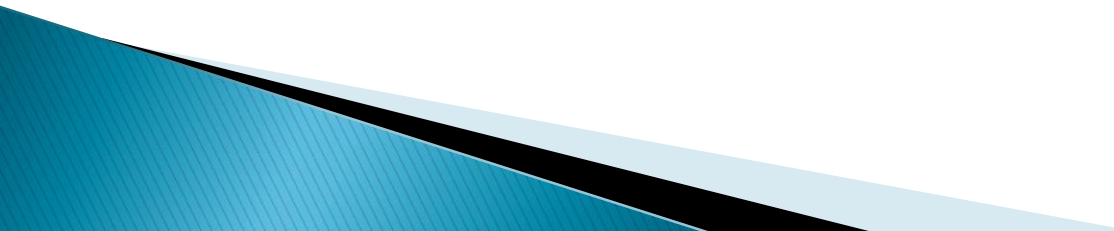
# Importance of Understanding Emotional Command Systems

- ▶ 1. Become more educated on your emotional needs
- ▶ 2. Increase your ability to make bids for connection and how to handle others' bids for connection
- ▶ 3. Better understand loved ones and friends



# STEP 3

Examine your  
emotional heritage





# Examining Your Emotional Heritage

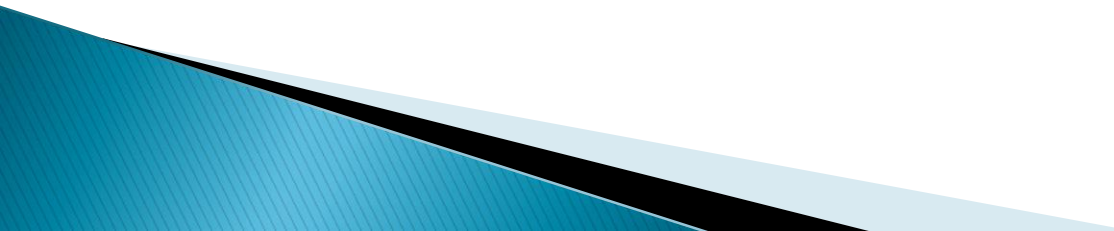
- ▶ Families deal with emotions in 4 different ways:
  - 1. Coaching
    - Family members help each other cope and solve problems
  - 2. Dismissing
    - Feelings are hidden and not acknowledged, so guidance rarely provided
  - 3. Laissez-faire
    - Expressing emotions is accepted, but they frequently wait for feelings of anger, sadness or fear to pass.
  - 4. Disapproving
    - Feelings should be kept hidden, and they are critical toward family members who express emotions.

# STEP 4

Sharpen your  
emotional  
communication skills



# Elements of Emotional Communication


- ▶ Facial Expressions
  - ▶ Movement & Gestures
  - ▶ Touch
  - ▶ Tone of Voice
  - ▶ Descriptive Words
  - ▶ Metaphors
- 

# The Art of Listening



- ▶ Focus on being interested, not interesting
- ▶ Ask questions
- ▶ Ask questions about a person's goals and dreams for the future
- ▶ Look for similarities

# Art of Listening Continued

- ▶ Occasionally paraphrase what the person says
  - ▶ Maintain appropriate eye contact
  - ▶ Let go of directing the outcome of a conversation
  - ▶ Limit television time
  - ▶ Focus your attention completely on that person
  - ▶ Respond with nods or sounds (minimal encouragers) during the course of the conversation
- 

# STEP 5

Find shared  
meaning

# Discover Shared Meaning

- ▶ Shared meaning are things you and another person have in common.
- ▶ This can be achieved when two individuals support each other's dreams even when there is no gain for the other person.
- ▶ We can achieve shared meaning by:
  - Communicating about our dreams and desires with another individual
  - Participating in rituals



# Creating Rituals

- ▶ Rituals are predictable, because they are repeated over and over again.
- ▶ Rituals differ from routines in that they have a symbolic meaning
  - Example: Routine: Brushing your teeth every night
  - Example: Ritual: Kissing your spouse goodbye before leaving for work
- ▶ Rituals ensure structure so that emotional connections happen on a regular basis





# Benefits of Rituals



- ▶ Symbolize cultural identity and values shared with our family, friends, or community
- ▶ Ensures that time is set aside for emotional connection
- ▶ Helps us to understand our feelings and process major life transitions
- ▶ Helps us to remain connected even though we may have differences with others

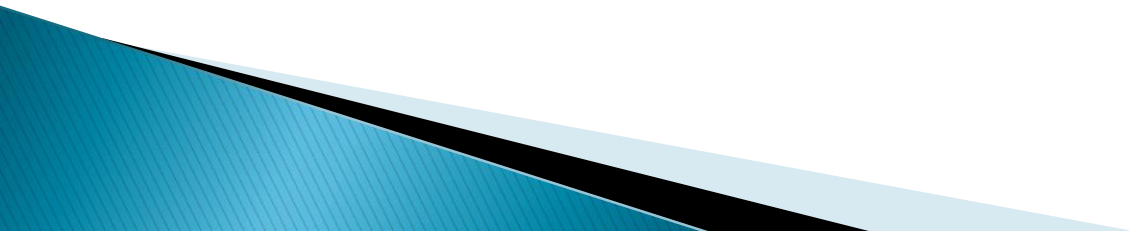
# Examples of Rituals

- ▶ Celebrating special days (Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays)
  - ▶ Date night with your partner
  - ▶ Taking vacations
  - ▶ Bedtime
  - ▶ Dinnertime
  - ▶ Attending sporting events
  - ▶ Doing charity work
  - ▶ Handling Finances
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# Pictures of Rituals



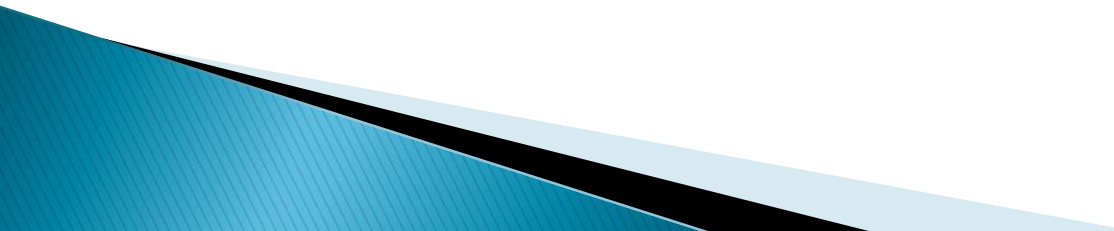
# MORE REAL WORLD APPLICATIONS



# Connecting (Turning Toward) Coworkers

- ▶ Activities we can do to build relationships with our coworkers
  - Say hello and goodbye each day
  - Return borrowed items
  - Make your coworker feel special on his or her birthday
  - Remember things that are of personal importance to your coworker (pets, children, partner, travels)
  - Laugh with your coworker
  - Give your coworker encouragement when they are having a difficult time, or when they have had a success
  - Be creative!!!

# Improving Your Relationship with Coworkers

- ▶ Lunch
  - ▶ Coffee
  - ▶ Potluck lunch
  - ▶ Form some type of interest group/club at work (book club, running club)
  - ▶ Volunteer for a community service organization
  - ▶ Plan parties/celebrations for fellow coworkers
  - ▶ Commute to work together
- 



# Goodbye Ritual

- ▶ Thank you for taking the time to listen & explore with us the subject of developing stronger emotional connections!
- ▶ For copies of the PowerPoint, please email [ecowger@latech.edu](mailto:ecowger@latech.edu)

