

Power of Two Marriage Skills Workshops
And Its Use with Refugees

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Abstract

Power of Two is a marriage education curriculum based on the premise of conflict resolution therapy that conflicts, within and between individuals, lie at the heart of emotional distress. The curriculum teaches the skills couples need for a smoothly functioning, egalitarian, and loving partnership. It teaches 1) the talking, listening, and dialogue skills that enable information to flow smoothly; 2) win-win problem solving and conflict resolution for handling differences; and 3) skills for maintaining a positive emotional tone: anger management, recovery from upsets, apologies, helping each other with personal problems, and keeping the home warmly loving. The curriculum is taught via participatory skill drills and role plays. Adapting the *Power of Two* proved helpful in response to the cultural differences that challenge marriage education with refugee couples

Power of Two Marriage Skills Workshops And its Use with Refugees

The *Power of Two Marriage Skills Workshops* program is a curriculum for teaching marriage skills in group settings. The curriculum prepares couples to be able to enjoy a smoothly functioning, mutually gratifying, egalitarian and warmly intimate marriage partnership. This paper explains the content, structure and teaching methods of the *Power of Two* program; focuses on how the program was adapted for refugee populations; and discusses the program's theoretical underpinnings and participant responses.

Effective couple communication and conflict resolution skills enhance the probabilities that a couple will enjoy a successful marriage (Larson and Holman, 1994). This makes sense. Enjoying athletics on a sports team or playing a musical instrument in a band require each player to have significant skill development. *Power of Two* posits that marriage similarly works best when the teammates have the requisite mental health and marriage skills. Without these skills, arguments, hurts, and disappointments tarnish love. With *Power of Two* skills, couples can enjoy conducting the business of life together in a life-long loving partnership.

The skills *Power of Two* workshops teach were first set forth in the book **The Power of Two** (Heitler, 1997) and then in its companion volume **The Power of Two Workbook** by (Heitler & Hirsch, 2003). Some couples can learn these skills on their own from the book and workbook. They also may learn the skills from the book and workbook in conjunction with marriage counseling. The workshops were created to further enhance the book-learning experience, and to address the reality that many couples are not willing or able to learn on their own from books, and should not need to wait until they need therapy to get the skills they need for marriage success.

The *Power of Two* authors have professional backgrounds in education (as teachers and curriculum writers) and also in clinical psychology (as marriage therapists and researchers). As a result, on the teaching side, the *Power of Two* curriculum was designed to build skills sequentially, from talking, listening and dialogue basics through to advanced skills such as how spouses can help each other when one is emotionally stressed. The lesson plans are structured to be easy for group leaders to follow. The teaching methodology is highly interactive between group leader and participants, and among the participants. Lessons are structured to begin with brief explanations of new skills, move quickly to doing them, and then allow time for discussion to deepen understanding of the purpose and import of the skill. And the curriculum includes practical elements that enhance educational effectiveness such as visual aids, skill drills, varied activity formats, and feedback forms for on-going course evaluation. With regard to psychological aspects of the curriculum, the authors' marriage therapist backgrounds have enabled them to select and convey the skills that their experience, in addition to research, have shown to be the key active ingredients of marital health.

The Curriculum

The content covered in the *Power of Two* curriculum covers the full spectrum of skills couples need to sustain a harmonious relationship. These skills cluster in three main categories:

- 1) *Information flow*
- 2) *Shared decision-making*
- 3) *Emotional self-regulation.*

How do these three skill categories empower couples to sustain a loving marriage?

Information flow refers to laminar, unblocked, non-turbulent sharing of information. Marriage partners live yoked together. They need to be able to share practical information in order to keep coordinated, and to avoid inadvertent misunderstandings, mishaps, disappointments and frustrations. They also need to be able to share information about feelings; feelings indicate when all is going well and highlight when a dilemma needs attention.

Cooperative talking and listening skills are an important beginning for effective information sharing. These fundamentals then need to be braided in a manner that enables dialogue to flow with both spouses alternating talking and listening symmetrically, and with short chunks rather than lengthy monologues. Effectively braided dialogue creates satisfying verbal intercourse and secure attachment as a couple.

Shared decision-making skills enable *his way* and *her way* to consistently result in an *our way*. When differences emerge, couples need skills beyond basic talking, listening, and dialogue. *Power of Two* teaches conflict resolution, shared decision-making, plus *fix-it talk* routines for handling the adjustments that keep couples' systems and routines attuned to changing life situations.

Emotional self-regulation prevents emotional volatility and fighting. The emotional arousal level of a dialogue, as much as the words that are spoken, determines whether a dialogue will remain collaborative or devolve into argument. Mutually respectful talking and listening skills are difficult enough to master when individuals are calm. The real test then comes when couples enter into heated moments. As emotional arousal goes up, most couples have difficulty holding on to their skills. In general, therefore, the best insurance that dialogue will stay cooperative and constructive is for couples to set low emotional arousal ceilings for themselves, with each spouse monitoring his own arousal levels and taking responsibility for staying in his/her own effective emotional zone.

One technique for modulating emotional intensity, and particularly anger, is for spouses to develop routines for disengaging and self-soothing. *Power of Two* teaches spouses to pause as soon as they see trouble brewing, remove themselves briefly from the escalating situation, calm themselves down, and then figure out about what they themselves can do to address the issues they have been discussing more effectively. They then can use routines that they have pre-choreographed for re-engaging, and resume constructive dialogue.

Emotional self-regulation skills also include routines for cleaning up the inevitable occasional hurts feelings and disappointments, for helping each other when one is upset about matters outside of the marriage, and for enhancing positivity to keep a consistently loving tone in the household.

The following list specifies these skills

Collaborative Dialogue Basics

- § Safe talking (*Say it* instead of silence or hints, staying non-toxic, with I-messages, in *would likes* rather than *don't likes*, using *when you's*, etc)
- § Asking open-ended *how* and *what* questions
- § Verbalizing feelings
- § Effective listening (listening to learn, not to *but*)
- § Listening to feelings
- § Braided dialogue (with Yes _____ and _____)
- § Using the 4 s's of effective dialogue (symmetry, short chunks, specifics, and summaries)

Shared Decision-making and Conflict Resolution

- § Changing *his way* and *her way* to *our way*
- § Keeping dialogue collaborative
- § Fix-it talk
- § No force-it talk
- § Cooperative openers (requests, not complaints)
- § The win-win waltz
- § Landmine issues (sensitivities from family of origin)
- § Traps and tips
- § Costs of non-shared decision-making (depression, anger, anxiety, addictions)

Emotional self-regulation

- § Understanding anger
- § Four myths that perpetuate anger
- § Climate controls
- § Anger is a stop sign
- § Receiving anger safely
- § Focus on the situation and solve the problem
- § Halting and reversing emotional escalations
- § Exit-Re-entry routines
- § Self-soothing during exits
- § Recovery from upsets
- § Five steps of full apologies

- § Helping each other through difficult emotional times
- § Maximizing warmth, affection, and intimacy

The Structure of the Curriculum

The *Power of Two* curriculum provides lesson plans for twelve modules, referred to as Lessons. Each Lesson, designed to be offered as a 1 ½ to 2 hour group workshop, contains 3 to 8 exercises, each focused on a different skill.

This modular format is designed to be maximally adaptable. On the minimum end modules can be used to teach as little as one brief ten-minute exercise. Brief one-exercise sessions can be useful, for instance, as introductions to marriage education, or as church-based marriage enrichment programs. Alternatively, all the modules together can be used to offer a 12-session, 18-24 hour, complete marriage skills education course.

Potential workshop participants seem to be more willing to sign up for a course that runs four or at most six sessions (one a week) than for a 12-session, three-month, commitment. For this reason *Power of Two* leaders who teach the full curriculum choose generally divide it into two courses, with Part I running four to six sessions--depending on if the sessions are 1 ½ or 2 hours in length--, and Part II also four to six sessions. Four sessions of two hours each consolidates the course rather densely, as 18 hours of material must then be condensed into 16 hours of workshops, but increases the likelihood that participants will feel they can commit to joining the group.

To teach the course in two parts, with six sessions the curriculum breaks up neatly into the first six and then the last six Lessons. When the course is taught as two parts but with each part consisting of just four somewhat longer sessions, the leader divides the topics at his/her discretion. In both formats, however, leaders generally find that the lesson plans include more exercises than they can include. Unless the course is taught at a particularly leisurely pace over a longer period of time, leaders are encouraged to make choices about which material they will emphasize. The remaining exercises they can explain briefly, illustrate with an example or two, and then assign as homework book and workbook pages.

Note that the workshops can be offered also as weekend retreats. Again, *Power of Two* gives the workshop leader full discretion in deciding how many hours of learning time to compact into a weekend, and how many skill lessons to cover in these hours, as both setting and participants can vary significantly. Weekend workshops offered at a resort, for instance, will include fewer workshop hours than workshops that are in-town based. Similarly, a workshop for corporate executives can cover more material in less time than a group of slower learners.

Teaching strategies and lesson plans

Power of Two conveys skills via role plays, skill drills, other interactive activities, and debriefing discussions. Most exercises have role play situations written up on "Situation Cards" that the leader

distributes. Participants take turns using the specific skill they are learning to handle the dilemma on their Situation Card.

Each of the twelve modules (Lessons) is laid out with two types of lesson plans—an overview sheet, and then lesson plans for each of the three to eight exercises in that module. Both types of lesson plans have standardized formats for easy scanning as the leader prepares and then teaches the workshop. The module overview lists the skills to be taught, the exercises that will teach these skills, the pages for the leader to read in preparation for teaching the skills, and the materials to gather so that the leader has all the necessary equipment and visual aids for the multiple exercises in that session. The lesson plans for each exercise then each include the following headings (See appendix A for sample exercise lesson plan).

- The **Introduction** offers a brief but engaging several sentences that can be read aloud by the leader.
- The **Objectives** helps leaders be clear about the purpose of the exercise.
- **Materials** usually include situation cards with the role plays; Cue Cards, which are visual aids that enhance clarity about the skills being taught; markers or chart paper; and props such as a baseball mitt or a flashlight that help to dramatize the concepts.
- **Set-up** suggests how to arrange the participants (seated in a circle, standing in two lines, etc.).
- **Procedure** details the skill drill or other plan of action.
- **Discussion** questions stimulate participants' thinking about what they have learned from each exercise. Most often, however, the group itself generates plenty of discussion. The leader's role becomes keeping the discussion focused and finite as group members process what they experienced and learned from the exercise.
- The **Conclusion** helps the leader sum up what has been taught in each exercise. Again, the group leader may start with the printed conclusion, but is encouraged to add what has turned out to be important to the participants in that particular workshop about the skill they have been learning.

Delivery and Strengths of the Program

The *Power of Two* program is distributed in the form of a Leaders' Kit, available via the internet (see www.PowerOfTwo.org). The kit consists of

- The curriculum.
- Situation Cards
- Cue Cards (visual aids)
- Feedback Forms
- An informal brief test for assessing pre and post-workshop functioning
- Three books and three audiotapes for the workshop leader to learn the skills

- Homework pages (with permission for copying printed in the curriculum guide). Reading assignments in the **Power of Two** book and workbook can further augment these basic homework sheets.
- Marketing suggestions and sample flyers
- Suggestions for leader effectiveness

Selection of Leaders, and Leader training

Most *Power of Two* leaders are mental health or marriage education professionals who self-select by purchasing the Leaders' Kit. Agencies, churches, and other organizations also purchase the program, training their employees or volunteers as workshop leaders.

Power of Two has no requirement for training sessions, no process of leader certification, and no means for testing leader competency because, as of the writing of this article, it is a curriculum, not an organization. That may change in the future. At present however the authors of the curriculum rely on trust that mental health professionals who teach the courses will adhere to professional ethical requirements not to practice outside their competencies, and that agencies will be responsible for the efficacy of the marriage educators who work for them.

The Leaders' Kit includes the necessary self-study materials, including the **Power of Two** book and workbook, for leaders to be able to train themselves with self-study. As mentioned earlier, each lesson plan specifies the pages and tapes to review before teaching that particular session. In addition, the authors periodically offer training sessions at conferences or in Denver. They generally offer an inexpensive training institute generally once each year at the SmartMarriages conference (see www.SmartMarriages.com). Additional training opportunities, particularly for agencies that would like to train multiple group leaders, can be arranged with the authors.

Individual professionals who purchase the *Power of Two* materials usually have a mental health or marriage educator degree, clinical experience, and a state license in their discipline. These professionals generally teach *Power of Two* from self-study alone relatively easily, although the first time they teach the course they do need to plan for extra prep time. Organizations employing potential group leaders who do not have a mental health or marriage education background, however, are advised to arrange for some form of *Power of Two* leader training.

Target audiences

Power of Two workshops initially were designed for three main purposes and their relevant populations:

- § Marriage readiness for singles, engaged couples, and newlyweds
- § Marriage enhancement for couples with functioning marriages
- § Marriage education, in conjunction with marriage counseling, for distressed couples, augmenting their therapy

At the same time, *Power of Two* is designed to be maximally adaptable for other purposes and additional target populations. The curriculum is not a rigid recipe but rather sets forth skills and exercises

for teaching them. It gives the course leader wide latitude as to how and when to use these ingredients, which makes the program adaptable for a wide range of audiences. Rather than selecting participants that will fit the program, the idea is for workshop leaders to adapt the program to their participants. In this way the program can be tailored to meet the specific needs of specific populations, for instance, low income groups, refugees, teenagers, college students, executives, people with addiction problems, domestic abusers and battered women, prison populations, ethnic or racial minorities, and religious groups.

One way workshop leaders can adapt the program is by varying the structure. Thus, for example, couples with children at home may find it difficult to attend evening classes. Weekend retreats with 8 hours or more of intensive learning packed into two days may be more realistic for these couples to attend than a series of weekly evening sessions. Church-based programs similarly may consolidate community more fully, a definite added bonus, if the workshops gather couples for weekend retreats. Or, for couples from traditional Latin American, Islamic, or orthodox Jewish cultures in which classes for men and women together would be frowned upon, the course can be taught with separate classes for men and for women.

The pacing of the course also can be varied. For prison populations or for populations with more major pathology such as domestic abusers, battered women, drug addicts, and alcoholics, the course can be paced more gradually. The twelve weeks of lessons may need to be stretched into twenty or more, with the course leader adding further practice examples and allowing more time for discussion of each skill drill. In business, health care, or Army settings where time may be limited, the full course can be compacted into 8 sessions.

Third, leaders can adapt the workshops by rewriting or adding role play situations to fit the life-stage issues of group participants other than married couples--adolescents, college students, singles preparing for marriage readiness-- and to replicate the life situation challenges or low income or immigrant participants. College students, for instance, react negatively to role plays of marriage situations, but enjoy the course when the situations they enact in the skill drills involve college relationship scenarios like dealing with overly-demanding professors or handling sexually-aggressive dates.

Workshop leaders attempting to lower the high rates of marital breakdown and divorce in refugee families have used all three of these methods of adapting Power of Two to their population. Their results will be explained shortly.

Christian edition

Places of worship are especially appropriate locations for marriage training. The authors therefore engaged the help of Christian pastoral advisors to adapt the *Power of Two* curriculum for Christian settings.

The Christian edition includes everything in the standard edition, plus two augmentations. First, the situation cards have been augmented to include role-plays on non-theological church-based issues, e.g., "My spouse is always late for church," or "I don't like sitting together in church because my spouse

sings out of tune.” Second, each lesson begins and ends with scriptural readings that book-end the workshop with spiritual thoughts.

Particular strengths of the program

First, the *Power of Two* curriculum teaches what spouses in healthy relationships actually do. Whereas other marriage programs tend to teach artificial patterns such as “active listening” or “floor” techniques, *Power of Two* workshops teach the actual skills naturally used by successful marriage partners. Instead of active listening (which encourages parrot-like repetitions of the prior speaker’s words), for instance, *Power of Two* teaches spouses to “listen to learn” and then to give evidence of what they have taken in by picking up on “what made sense to them” and elaborating that. For *braided dialogue* spouses give evidence that they have taken in what the partner has just said, particularly if the subject is sensitive, before they add new information.

Second, *Power of Two* teaches an especially broad range of skills. For instance, all marriage education programs teach basic talking and listening guidelines. *Power of Two* then adds skills for effectively interweaving talking and listening to create satisfying collaborative dialogue. To the exit skills most marriage curricula teach for anger-management *Power of Two* adds the concept of setting anger ceilings so that couples can stay within their emotionally effective zone. The curriculum includes exercises for assessing positivity, encouraging spouses to increase the affectionate interchanges they share with each other. And how to be helpful when a spouse is upset so couples counsel each other in hard times without antagonizing mistakes such as telling the troubled spouse what s/he “should” do.

Third, *Power of Two* offers detailed coaching on how to do each skill. For instance, *Power of Two* goes beyond I-messages to teach couples to talk in *would likes* rather than *don’t wants*. “I don’t like sitting all day in this stuffy apartment,” evokes a negative emotional tone; by contrast, “I would like to get outside and enjoy some sunshine and fresh air” creates an upbeat feel. The word *not*, potent even in abbreviated form, inevitably evokes a negative tone and is emotionally depressogenic. At the same time, an *I would like you to* sentence-starter will sound controlling, e.g., “I would like *you* to go for a walk with me.” By contrast, an *I would like to*...launches fully cooperative dialogue. “I would like to go for a walk. How would you feel about joining me?”

Fourth, *Power of Two* teaches state-of-the art conflict resolution techniques. Other programs have components that they call conflict resolution, but the skill sets they teach do not incorporate the breakthrough concepts in the more recent mediation, negotiation, and psychological literatures.

Fifth, *Power of Two* makes a clear distinction between marriage education and marriage therapy. This point is very important for settings such as churches where confidentiality is an issue. The sessions do not allow therapy. Couples do not discuss their current couple conflicts or their family of origin histories. When Mrs. Jones sits by Mrs. White in church the next day, she needs to feel that her private world has not become public. At the same time, with better skills, couples who take the course generally find that they are increasingly able to resolve their troubling differences in newly satisfying ways.

Sixth, *Power of Two* is designed to give program leaders maximum freedom to adapt the program to the specific needs of their target population. The program encourages leaders to take the lesson plans as starting points, not as plans that are set in stone.

Seventh, *Power of Two* was authored by practicing marriage therapists, clinicians with years of practical experience turning marriage distress into marriage satisfaction. The fact that the *Power of Two* authors' personal marriages are emotionally robust with no divorces, and fully successful marriages further attests to the merits of the skills they teach.

Adapting *Power of Two* for Refugee Populations

America welcomes many refugees from countries around the globe. In addition, the American government offers programs to help refugees through the many difficulties they typically encounter in the resettlement process. Unfortunately, marital stresses and divorce rates tend to be very high for these couples. The government therefore has been encouraging the agencies that provide support services for refugees to include marriage education in their offerings.

Teaching marriage communication skills to refugees as they seek to launch new lives in America poses three major problems.

First, the whole concept of marital education is completely foreign for most refugees. Their cultures may have no tradition of psychologizing, and in many parts of the world marriage has not been an arena for self-examination.

Second, when refugees move physically across the globe to a new culture, their patterns of interpersonal communications are among the few parts of their former lives that they can bring with them. Especially in an arena as personal and potent as marriage, they are unlikely to abandon these beliefs and habits without major evidence that new ways will be more positive options.

Third, life in a new culture slowly but inevitably pushes people to learn new ways. Different people in the same family, however, typically go through the acculturation process very differently and at different paces, sparking frictions that ignite conflict, destabilize marriages, and in many cases end in divorce. Decreasing couple conflict and angry escalations is therefore a highest priority.

The Illinois Refugee Family Strengthening Project

The Illinois Refugee Family Strengthening Project, funded by a grant from the Office of Refugee Resettlement through the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, chose *Power of Two* as the curriculum for their Healthy Families Education programs for refugee populations. Refugees in this program come from Bosnia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Middle East, a number of African countries, and the Former Soviet Union.

Tatyana Fertelmeyster, MA, LCPC, the coordinator of the Illinois Refugee Family Strengthening Project, adapted the *Power of Two* curriculum for the special needs of refugees. She subsequently has been successfully teaching this adapted version to group leaders to teach to their refugee populations. In

addition, she has written an augmentation of the program that addresses the concerns of refugee teenagers.

Fertelmeyster's prior experience working with refugees, plus her experience as an immigrant herself, enabled her to identify which skills refugees most need, what life dilemmas they almost all face that trigger anger and conflict, and what pitfalls would arise when programs were instituted to convey these skills. Her additions to *Power of Two* acknowledge that refugees' lives tend to be overwhelmed with challenges and time demands. In addition, her adaptations start from the assumption that refugees' cultural paradigms about marriage differ from the expectations of American spouses.

Fertelmeyster and the Illinois Refugee Family Strengthening Project selected *Power of Two* from the various marriage education options for three main reasons:

1. Practical content
2. Engaging lesson plans
3. Flexibility

Content. The content of *Power of Two* was regarded as particularly practical because it addresses the problems that most destabilize refugee marriages, that is, anger and conflict. The *Power of Two* guidelines for couples with regard to managing anger are clear and realistic. The "win-win waltz," of just three steps can be understood and implemented by people with a broad range of educational backgrounds.

Engaging Lesson Plans. The lesson plans appeared engaging because they are participatory, encourage discussion, and teach the skills refugees are most eager to learn. And the lessons could be made particularly relevant for refugees by adding role plays specific to the problems refugee couples typically confront.

Flexibility. The modular structure of the curriculum appeared to make flexibility feasible. The group format enables the workshop to be taught to one or the other spouse if both cannot attend, and to separating men and women where the cultures would require gender separation. Also, the program's authors explicitly encouraged educators to "make the program theirs" by making whatever changes would tailor the program directly to refugees' specific concerns and values.

Taking *Power of Two* across cultural lines

Every culture has a concept of marriage. Even more so, every culture has a concept of a good marriage. What other cultures regard as a good marriage, how it looks, and how it works can differ dramatically from the American version. People who move to the United States from troubled spots around the globe are prepared for many things to be very different in their new country. One thing refugees do not expect is that this culture will start affecting them right at home in their marital interactions or their parenting.

Offering refugees Made-In-America marital or parenting education can be damaging rather than helpful unless it is done with respect to and understanding of their culture. As Ann Grove, Director of

World Relief in Moline, IL, wrote about her experience with the *Power of Two* program as adapted for refugees, “We have certainly seen the need for the program, and we appreciate having materials customized ... to the needs of people here. The ability to revise American programming to suit other cultures is crucial. The Sudanese refugees, for example, have family dynamics far different from those considered acceptable in America. How do you live with and communicate with one wife, when you're used to having three wives and moving from home-to-home, and communicating within the framework of a strong and multi-aged community?”

Why do American marriage skills feel especially foreign and counter to refugees' cultural backgrounds? Take speaking up for instance. When authors Heitler and Hirsch went to Chicago to train the trainers who would be teaching *Power of Two* to refugee groups, the very first skill they introduced was what *Power of Two* refers to as *Say It*. The skill teaches how to be direct, raising concerns in a clear and open fashion so they can be addressed. *Say It*, however, offers precisely the opposite formula to what most refugees have experienced as helpful communication in their cultures-of-origin.

The mainstream US-American cultural pattern of communication is what those who study cultural differences term low-context communication. Low-context communication expects verbal messages to be clear, direct and informative. Everything a speaker wants to convey to a listener is included in his/her message. The listener is not expected to guess a meaning of the message based on a context. This way of communicating fits quite nicely with the individualistic orientation of US-American culture.

Cultures that are more group-oriented (and practically all countries from which refugees come to the United States are group-oriented) are more accustomed to what is termed high-context communication. “High context” implies that a speaker cannot be direct; clear and open expression of concerns and preferences would violate social norms. Instead, the speaker offers only indirect mention of the issues. The listener then is responsible for understanding the meaning of the message from the context. Ability of the speaker to phrase the message in a way that will be satisfactorily decoded, and of the listener to read between the lines, become important skills in this communication mode.

Teaching the *Say It* skill therefore requires significant discussion that expressly appreciates the old cultural methods of indirect information-sharing, and at the same time gently introduces new options. The culturally adapted refugee materials for *Power of Two* teaches workshop leaders, referred to as trainers, to introduce the *Say It* skill with the following ideas:

What is considered to be a clear communication can be different in different cultures. From the US-American point of view clear communication is direct communication. It does not come naturally for many people in this culture and is often harder for women than it is for men.

In marriages people often avoid saying what they need to say. Sometimes they hint, hoping that the other person will figure out what they want. Sometimes they

don't mention anything at all for a long time and then end up feeling really upset about the fact that what they need or want is not happening. In this situation when a person finally says something it might come out as a hurtful and resentful comment.

Learning to *Say It* instead of *Hinting* or *Hurting* is a useful skill whether you exercise it at home with your spouse or your children or use it to communicate with your co-workers or your children's school.

An expert in the area of conflict resolution, Dr. Susan Heitler emphasizes that to resolve any conflict productively someone first has to raise the issue. *Say It* therefore is the first step in effective conflict resolution.

One arena of on-going discoveries made by the team of the Illinois Refugee Family Strengthening Project has been in identifying instances in which communication experience differs significantly depending on what language is being used. For instance, participants in one train-a-trainer session had no problem coming up with English words that describe different levels of anger. However, when asked to come up with words in their native languages that describe different levels of anger, many of them found the task far more challenging. Different languages are very differently equipped to express people's emotions. Different cultures vary significantly in what they permit or don't permit to put in words.

At the same time, the refugee trainers have found that an area of striking cross-cultural similarity is the potency of emotional tone. In one of the lessons, for instance, participants are asked to convert "Don't Want" messages into "Would Like" messages. During a train-the-trainer session with participants from many different countries, the potential trainers were asked to say both a "Don't want" sentence and then a "Would like" in their own languages. The group had no problem feeling the difference between negative and positive statements even when nobody understood a word in each other's languages.

Fertelmeyster's refugee additions to the *Power of Two* program offer a variety of solutions to cultural differences dilemmas. She adds a whole new chapter so that the program starts with a lesson called "Coming to America as a Couple/Family." She adds sensitive introductions to skills, as in the example above. She adds role-plays that address situations commonly faced by refugee couples. She selects which skills are highest priority in terms of refugees most immediate marriage needs. She revises the teaching methods where lesson plans would not be effective with non-Americans.

Fertelmeyster also offers refugee-sensitive suggestions for the group leaders who lead the sessions. Culturally-adjusted *Power of Two* refugee programs are generally taught by caseworkers who have been working with refugees through resettlement agencies. A majority of them came to the US as refugees themselves. They have not necessarily had a professional training in either mental health or

marriage education. To ensure the quality of their work leading workshops, Fertelmeyster's writes "Notes for the Leader." For example:

Notes for the Leader

Make sure to prepare a demonstration that will make most sense to the population with which you are working.

These concepts can be new and difficult for refugees. Even in an individual-oriented culture like the US people have to be taught to say "I feel upset when you don't do what you promised". It's much more common to hear "You are a liar! You are ruining my life!"

It is important to emphasize again and again that we are offering tools our participants may find helpful to have at their disposal; we are not giving them new rules by which to live their lives.

Engage your clients as much as possible in the discussion of cultural differences. Conscious awareness of these differences is among the most helpful skills for cultural adjustment.

Lastly, Fertelmeyster's adaptation of *Power of Two* suggests that some didactic metaphors in the original program be eliminated or modified for refugee populations. For instance, in the initial training *Power of Two* co-author Abigail Hirsch introduced an exercise based on baseball as a metaphor. The trainers, like the refugees they will be educating, were mainly immigrants from other cultures. The baseball metaphor proved confusing instead of enlightening. As only two people in the group had a sense of what baseball is and the trainees found themselves lost in the metaphor instead of helped by it.

Feedback and Evaluation

The quantity of implementation of *Power of Two* by refugee educators has been impressive. In the six months since the first group of twenty plus trainers were introduced to the *Power of Two* model, at least 500 refugees have been exposed to various parts of this curriculum.

To assess the impact of these exposures, a formal evaluation with outcome studies would be helpful. To do outcome studies, however, a program needs to be rigidly defined—precisely the opposite need of the flexibility that working with refugees requires. *Power of Two* in general thus far has opted for the flexible approach—trying to provide a very flexible tool that is based on the best information out there, but that can (and should) be modified based on the experience of the program deliverers. This flexibility has been all the more a priority in working with refugees. The Illinois Refugee Family Strengthening Project is a collaborative effort of 15 different agencies involved in serving refugees from all over the world. Clearly, "One Size Fits All" approach would have never worked for this coalition.

In addition, the refugee augmentations of the program are quite new. As a result of both factors, subjective reports are available, but not formalized program evaluation.

So far the overall feedback has been positive. Participants seem to be particularly appreciative of the fact that trainers incorporate refugee realities into the sessions.

Using *Power of Two* as a basic model allowed for flexible formats for conveying marriage skills. While *Power of Two* lesson plans have been used as a curriculum for on-going groups, the single-session format possibility has been particularly helpful. It often proves difficult or impossible to get a full group of refugees to sign up for an on-going series of classes. As was mentioned already, relationship education is a very foreign concept in many cultures. In addition, refugees who often work two jobs to provide for their families don't have much spare time. Intermittent one-session *Power of Two* workshops, however, do attract participants, and can communicate helpful skill sets.

Fertelmeyster reports that feedback to her after training trainers with *Power of Two* suggests that the program has been well-received by refugee family education professionals. One reason is because of its specificity. Trainers like that the program does not just tell what to do; it takes participants through the detailed steps of how to do it. For example, it does not just suggest looking for win-win solutions to conflict, or avoiding angry arguments. It takes participants through the multiple specific steps that lead from conflict to mutually satisfying solutions, and from anger and fighting to calm resumption of productive dialogue.

The decision to choose a marriage skills program that emphasizes skills for conflict resolution and anger management proved important. Individual refugee spouses are generally dealing with post-traumatic issues plus the ongoing stresses of adjusting to a new culture, yet at the same time as a couple must make many difficult decisions. Many couples end up fighting, or harboring resentments over decisions that one partner has made without enough input from the other. They appreciate the conflict resolution and anger management skills that help them turn their conflicts into cooperative shared decision-making and that can prevent anger, violence, and depression from darkening their homes.

The feedback from Kabuika Kamunga, Client Service Counselor Pan-African Association, Chicago, IL, emphasized the importance of this emphasis. "In this marriage training, I learned a great lesson: how to manage anger. I no longer see anger as a cultural justification; I am now able to extrapolate the myth that justifies domestic violence and see the emotion for what it is. My goal is to share this newly acquired knowledge with my clients: to show them how anger can be used as a stop sign to take time to figure out what is going on."

Refugee group leaders express appreciation for the suggestions in the Notes for the Leaders, and continue to add to them. For instance, one Note mentions that a trainer often needs to demonstrate the role-play in front of the group before inviting group participation. This modification came from a suggestion made by a Vietnamese trainer who said that in her culture nobody would want to role-play an angry woman because that would lead others to believe that she has anger in her.

In train-the-trainers workshops, a primary focus has been to help the trainees, who have considerable sensitivity about refugee-related issues, master the new skills they will be teaching as marriage educators. In the process trainers learn quite a bit about their own patterns of communication, a step which is necessary for them to be able to pass new skills on to their clients. In the words of a caseworker from Bosnia who went through the train-the-trainer and is now teaching her clients: "I think that all our clients and we can benefit from this program, which is based on the book **The Power of Two** and I love it. Personally, in my marriage I can already see the change. I learn how to communicate to my husband and when to stop when we have a conflict."

Refugees are more willing to come to workshops that discuss parenting issues than marital ones. In addition to using *Power of Two* explicitly for marital education, a number of the refugee trainers have begun to teach it as a basic framework for parenting programs. Anger management skills or cooperative decision-making skills fit very naturally with what parents need to learn to feel more control of their children. Moreover, parenting difficulties and differences often spark tension between the parents as refugees are caught between old and new ideas of how to raise children. Teaching communication, anger management, and conflict resolution skills as parenting skills helps to reduce an otherwise frequent source of marriage conflict.

Refugee teenagers have shown surprising willingness to participate in communication programs based on *Power of Two* lesson plans. Fertelmeyster's program for teens, "Teenagers, Relationships, and Cultural Transitions," incorporates *Power of Two* as one of its four modules, calling it "Communication Toolbox: Useful Skills for Dealing with Practically Anybody."

Some caseworkers use *Power of Two* with refugee clients during home visits with one couple/family. A similar use has been in one-on-one discussion with a teenager. "My experience with the teens I've worked with in the past is that to effectively address very sensitive issues (such as dating), it has to be done on their terms when, where, and how they want. So for example, if I am driving a client to an appointment of some sort, while we're together talking in the car about their family situation or school or friends, etc., I might decide to bring up the subject of dating and weave it into the conversation," says Trudi Langendorf, Refugee Families Program Supervisor for Chicago Connections.

The words of Liliana Popovic, Director of Counseling Center of World Relief, DuPage County, IL, after a series of train-the-trainers sessions perhaps sum up best the responses of the refugee group-leaders who have been learning to teach *Power of Two* marriage skills. "All participants agreed after the first session that the training offers very valuable information, liked to be exposed to material, but had no hope that communication and dynamics within their marriages would be changed. However, as the training has advanced many of them reported changes that are occurring (often in a very humorous way). All members of the group, regardless of gender or age, stressed importance of teaching children, adolescents and young couples those skills."

Theoretical Underpinnings of *Power of Two*

Power of Two workshops, and also the book and workbook, teach the talking-together skills that enable a couple to interact harmoniously. Conflict resolution theory (Heitler, 1990) provides the theoretical foundations for this emphasis. The conflict theory perspective on emotional health and emotional distress posits that conflicts--within and between people, or between people and circumstances--lie at the core of emotional distress.

Why do conflicts arise between a couple? Conflict theory posits three main sources. First, conflicts arise because of perceived incompatible elements exerting force in opposing or divergent directions (Heitler, 1990). That is, when couples believe that their desires differ, a tug of war may ensue. Addressing important decisions with positional bargaining rather than interest-based bargaining (Fisher and Ury, 1981) creates adversarial stances. *Power of Two* teaches interest-based bargaining (cooperative shared decision-making) as the *win-win waltz*.

Second, conflicts arise purely out of technical glitches. For instance, instead of saying their concerns (*Say it*), partners may make the technical error of voicing what they think the other thinks—e.g., “You think that I’m stupid because I don’t have a college degree.” *Power of Two* would label this you-message, and any talking for or about the other or telling the other what to do, a *crossover*. Crossovers, which are a locus of focus problem, frustrate the speaker. By focusing on the other person the speaker becomes unable to identify his/her own concerns—“I carry a sense of being less than you since I didn’t go to college.” This frustration raises the speaker’s inner sense of tension, launching a tone of conflict. At the same time, crossovers almost inevitably evoke defensive responses-- “No! That’s not true!” Crossovers evoke a sense of threat in the partner because they constitute a boundary invasion.

Ignoring partners’ comments or giving insufficient evidence of having been listening, similarly can ignite conflicts. So can talking in monologues instead of symmetrical short chunks, talking in an irritated voice, or powering over instead of making bilateral decisions. *Power of Two* teaches communication skills that replace the technical deficits that would otherwise cause irritation, hurt feelings, and arguments.

A third source of couple conflict comes from sensitivities generated in earlier, and especially family of origin, relationships. A man who grew up being hushed by parents who did not want to hear his desires or concerns can mistakenly believe that he should not speak up about his preferences to his wife. He may then start resenting her “control” over him, even if in fact she would very much like to hear his wishes and be able to please him. The “transference” of patterns and expectations from family of origin experiences onto the marriage partner can engender resentments and conflict independent of what the partner does. The Landmines exercise in *Power of Two* addresses this kind of conflict.

As a correlate to the basic premise that poorly handled conflict induces emotional distress, conflict resolution theory posits, and longitudinal studies confirm, the following about marriage. When spouses lack adequate conflict resolution skills, including information flow and emotional self-modulation skills, their marriage is likely suffer; having these skills, by contrast, offers a protective impact (Bradbury & Karney, 1993; Carrere & Gottman, 1999; Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Poor conflict resolution skills put a

relationship at risk for being stoppered up with resentments from unexpressed concerns, fatigued by tensions, and/or marred by hurtful fighting. Poorly handled conflicts can gradually spoil the goodwill, sexual attraction, and mutual commitment of even the most well-matched and loving couple. Conflict prevention and resolution skills keep love strong.

Pathways to psychopathology and pathways to positive functioning

Conflict theory posits that when spouses cannot talk effectively with each other about decisions and difficulties, trouble almost inevitably lies ahead (Heitler, 1990). Trouble can take the form of resentments, anger and emotional turbulence; depression; anxiety and tension; or addictions and obsessive-compulsive patterns. Conflict theory clarifies four pathways that lead to each of these specific forms of emotional dysfunction—plus a fifth pathway that consistently leads to emotional and marital well-being.

On the coercive (fight) pathway of conflict resolution, arguments are settled by who dominates, and anger is what enables spouses to “win” the dispute. On the submissive (give up) pathway, one spouse gives up, generally to keep the peace, but depression is the by-product. When an unsettled conflict hovers without movement toward resolution (the freeze pathway), anxiety and tension cloud the emotional tone of the family. Avoiding sensitive issues altogether (the escape pathway), leads to obsessive-compulsive patterns including addictions.

By contrast, couples with skills for traversing the fifth and more sanguine pathway, the pathway of shared decision-making and win-win conflict resolution, can enjoy a quite consistently positive marital experience. They may have occasional skill slippages, especially when they are tired, hungry, or overly stressed. They may stumble from time to time into misunderstandings and disappointments. When they do, however, their skills enable them to clarify what happened, clean up the upset, and learn from the mistakes. Because they can talk together with open information flow, they work out constructive solutions to the many practical dilemmas that inevitably arise in running a household together. They are able to enjoy living lives as partners.

One reason that childhood attachment styles (secure, ambivalent, hostile, etc) often are replicated in adult relationships is that children learn from their families of origin a language for dealing with conflict. The manner in which their parents treat them, interactions with their siblings, and how the parents interact with each other all teach children, for instance, to complain instead of requesting when they want something, and to give the silent treatment instead of discussing disappointments constructively. From their families of origin people learn domination, giving up, anxious freezing, and/or avoidance, —or how to pool viewpoints cooperatively. They learn these patterns like children learn language. In a French-speaking family, children grow up speaking French. Multiple research studies have concluded that a conflictual parental marriage is a risk factor for marriage unhappiness and divorce (Larson and Holman, 1994). In a dysfunctional family, children learn dysfunctional conflict resolution.

Power of Two takes an optimistic stance, however, toward the family of origin impact on adult conflict patterns. Adults who grew up in dysfunctional families but are open to learning skills for talking

together, conflict resolution, and emotional self-regulation can enjoy every bit as positive a marriage relationship as those who learned these skills at home. Spouses need not be consigned to repeat the mistakes of their parents. *Power of Two* skills prevent history from becoming destiny.

Neurotic personality traits at marriage are another significant risk factor for marriage difficulties and divorce (Larson and Holman, 1994). Again, *Power of Two* addresses this factor in a similarly optimistic fashion. It regards habits that clinicians would label neurotic behavior as skill deficits, and then teaches healthier patterns. Narcissists can learn bilateral listening. Hysterics can learn emotional self-regulation; and they can learn to convert complaining in *don't likes* to expressing their concerns as *would likes*. Abusers can learn to verbalize feelings, to forego crossovers, and to allow their spouse to have feelings too.

One exercise in the workshops and several in the workbook offer a structure for spouses to look back at interactions they experience in their families of origin to gain historical perspective on their current sensitivities, unhelpful or neurotic attitudes, and skill deficits. While *Power of Two* generally makes a clear distinction between therapy and marriage education, this brief glance in the rear view mirror can help participants understand more fully where they learned their prior communication, emotion, and conflict resolution habits. The primary focus of the program, however, is definitely on building skills rather than on looking backwards at why the skills have not been there before.

In sum, conflict resolution therapy theory (Heitler, 1990) and the marital stability literature reviewed by Larsen and Holman (1994) identify healthy communication, emotional self-regulation, and conflict resolution skills as important protective factors for sustaining positive marriage functioning. Marriage requires high level skills; *Power of Two* teaches these skills.

Data on which conflict resolution therapy theory and *Power of Two* skills are based

The conflict resolution therapy theory of emotional and marital functioning was derived from three arenas (Heitler, 1990):

- 1) Studies of negotiation, mediation, and interest-based bargaining in the business, law, and international relations literatures
- 2) Psychological research on communication patterns in family relationships and
- 3) The authors' clinical experience treating distressed couples

Heitler's book **From Conflict to Resolution** (1990) was the first to translate research and concepts from the conflict resolution literature of business, law, and international relations into the world of psychology. The original conflict resolution literature contrasts positional bargaining, which settles conflicts by who has more power, with interest-based bargaining, saying that conflicts move to cooperative resolution when participants verbalize the interests that lie behind the positions. Heitler changed this terminology into "exploring underlying concerns" and "selecting mutually agreeable solutions." This change from a horizontal to a vertical metaphor, and from "interests" to "concerns" enables the important insights of the mediation world to make sense in the language of family and personal relationships.

The marriage therapy room has provided a vital testing ground for the premises of conflict resolution theory, and for the skills taught in *Power of Two* materials. Only premises and skills that year after year in case after case have proven effective converting troubled marriages into gratifying ones have been included in the *Power of Two* program.

Power of Two Feedback, and Follow-Up

The *Power of Two* curriculum includes a questionnaire with numeric and qualitative evaluation questions (see sample). The feedback form is designed to be filled out by participants at the end of each workshop class (Lesson) so that the leader receives constructive feedback after each session, and then again for feedback on the full series of sessions at the end of the course.

At the time of this writing formal outcome efficacy studies have not yet been conducted. The qualitative feedback we receive from participants in the courses in Denver, however, has been highly appreciative. The session-by-session evaluation forms provide on-going feedback to leaders about potential helpful changes --that the leader's style be more relaxed, more focused, give more time to digest one or another skill, or otherwise adjusted. Most of the feedback, however, expresses that the participants are finding the course helpful, challenging, and fun.

Subjective comments from participants regarding changes in their marriage relationship after taking the course are typified by the following comments from a couple who recently graduated from a Denver *Power of Two* evening course of eight two-hour sessions (Parts I and II, 4 sessions each).

From M. and S.

- § "We're more light-hearted together, even when things go wrong."
- § "We see our skill deficits and chuckle instead of getting mad at each other."
- § "Seeing the other couples just like us with similar problems, made us seem more normal, not needing a divorce"
- § "When my husband gets off track, doing something that used to upset me like talking in an irritated voice, I don't get upset any more because I know that the two of us are aiming for the same skills. He doesn't mean to talk to me that way; it's just old habit and how he learned in his family. He's trying."
- § "When we visited my husband's family, they didn't upset either of us. We could see what they were doing as their skill deficits. We could even label the mistakes they were making. We didn't take them personally. It's just sad they haven't had a chance to learn like we have."

Follow-up Learning Options

Power of Two uses the **Power of Two** book and **Workbook** to boost learning from the workshop sessions. Couples are assigned Xeroxed homework sheets plus pages in the book and Workbook after each session. At the end of the full program (or Part I or II), couples are encouraged to complete whatever reading and workbook pages they have not finished. Lastly, couples are encouraged to keep their book and workbook as resources they can turn to in the future when tensions arise.

This "booster" use of the book and workbook is very important. In the course couples learn to identify and label the kind of problem that is causing momentary tensions. Knowing what they are dealing with, they then can scramble to look back at that chapter in the book or workbook. For instance, do we have to make a shared decision? Are we polarizing in a conflict that needs resolving? Are we escalating instead of disengaging when our anger levels begin to go up? What were the bases we learned to cover in the "baseball" game for helping each other when one of us feels upset about something outside of the relationship?

Risks and Limitations, and Solutions

Confidentiality, a significant issue for participants in group marriage learning experiences, is protected in *Power of Two* workshops by having couples learn skills via role plays rather than by talking about their personal couple conflicts and concerns. Workshop leaders are encouraged also to limit self-revelation by keeping the participants focused on the skill exercises rather than allowing self-revelation. Because each lesson has so much material to cover, most group members seem to appreciate when the leader encourages them to keep moving forward rather than to wander too far on side roads relevant primarily to one individual or couple's issues.

At the same time, the program addresses the reality that couples may need encouragement and structure for utilizing their new skills at home. This concern is addressed by giving homework reading and exercises for between-sessions growth. The homework reading reinforces learning of the specific skills presented in each session. The homework exercise sheets and workbook assignments give participants a structure for applying these skills to their personal couple issues.

The overall *Power of Two* program covers many skills, each lesson includes multiple exercises, and each exercise concludes with multiple discussion questions. The positive of this high density learning experience is that the participants generally feel strongly enriched by the experience. The negative can be that they feel overwhelmed by a course that moves too fast for their learning abilities.

Leaders need to be sensitive to these balances, and responsive to the needs of the participants. They need to give participants enough a workshop that feels fast-moving and fun, but still allows enough processing time that the participants all understand the material that has been covered. Group spirit can be harnessed toward this end, by encouraging members to help each other on the difficult skills. The book and workbook also provide critical at-home review materials.

Leaders must be careful to identify those couples that are not able to apply their new skills successfully without additional help. These couples can be encouraged to supplement their group experience with couple counseling or with additional meetings with their group leader.

One other potentially negative consequence of the program has come up repeatedly in leader training sessions. *Power of Two* leaders typically report that the skill sets they are teaching are new for them. While growth is generally good, leaders' new knowledge can destabilize their own marriages. *Power of Two* leader training sessions do include discussion of how leaders can handle their new asymmetry of communication skills with their spouses. In addition, new leaders are encouraged to have their spouses join them in the training sessions. They can invite their spouse to read **The Power of Two** book and to join them in doing the **Workbook**. Leader training also can be accomplished by leader and spouse attending a couples' workshop course together rather than, or in addition to, train-the-trainer sessions. Whatever the solution, potential disruptions to leaders' marriages from their having gained advanced marriage interaction skills is a potential unintended consequence of *Power of Two* leader training that must be taken seriously.

On the whole, however, the risks to *Power of Two* leaders need to be put in context. As the refugee program leaders report, most find their new skills beneficial at home. They also report that they find the workshops exhilarating to teach. They feel uplifted seeing the participants enjoying the interactive learning activities, asking thought-provoking questions as they struggle to learn each skill, and clearly improving their ability to handle the many difficult talking-together challenges of married life.

Conclusion

The *Power of Two* workshops program presents a broad range of state-of-the-art marriage skills. The modular curriculum gives the professionals who lead the courses considerable flexibility, and significant responsibility, for choosing how best to combine the basic ingredients of the program for their particular setting and population. Leaders of *Power of Two* programs with refugees have taken advantage of this flexibility, creating a particularly culture-sensitive version of the program.

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Appendix A

STUDENT FEEDBACK FORM

Your code # _____ **Today's date** _____ **Lesson #** _____

I found today's lesson engaging.					
1	2	3	4	5	NA
Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	

The instructor of this course encouraged questions and comments.					
1	2	3	4	5	NA
Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	

The instructor of this course is knowledgeable about the material being presented.					
1	2	3	4	5	NA
Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	

The pace of today's lesson was:					
1	2	3	4	5	NA
Too slow		just right		Too fast	

With the help of your group leader, list the exercises in today's session. Then for each exercise, rank how useful you believe it will be for you, and how well you feel you understand and will be able to implement the skill presented.

Exercises from today's workshop.	Useful in my life	Understand and will be able to use
	1 2 3 4 5 I'll never use it. I'll use it lots.	1 2 3 4 5 I could use more work on it . I understand it.
	1 2 3 4 5 I'll never use it. I'll use it lots.	1 2 3 4 5 I could use more work on it . I understand it.
	1 2 3 4 5 I'll never use it. I'll use it lots.	1 2 3 4 5 I could use more work on it . I understand it.
	1 2 3 4 5 I'll never use it. I'll use it lots.	1 2 3 4 5 I could use more work on it. I understand it.
	1 2 3 4 5 I'll never use it. I'll use it lots.	1 2 3 4 5 I could use more work on it . I understand it.

What I liked in today's class was:

Next time you teach this class I would change:

Leader's Self-Report Inventory

Today's date _____ **Lesson #** _____

Before looking at student feedback, answer the following questions:

- The part(s) of today's lesson that I liked the best:
Why?

- The part(s) of today's lesson that were problematic:
Why?

- Next time I teach this lesson I:

Summary of Student Responses

Compute average scores for each of the following items:

	Average Score
I found today's lesson engaging.	
The instructor of this course encouraged questions and comments.	
The instructor of this course is knowledgeable about the material being presented.	
The pace of today's lesson was too slow (1), too fast (5)	
Usefulness of _____	
Understanding of _____	
Usefulness of _____	
Understanding of _____	
Usefulness of _____	
Understanding of _____	
Usefulness of _____	
Understanding of _____	
Comments	

What and how can I improve based on these responses?

Appendix B

Sample Lesson Plan

EXERCISE 1D: MORE INSIGHT AND HOW/WHAT QUESTIONS 10 minutes

Introduction

Skills of talking about oneself rather than about the other, and of asking open-ended questions, take practice to become automatic.

Objectives

This exercise consolidates the learning from the prior two exercises.

Materials

- Q 3 Cue Cards: Insights, Crossovers (you-statements), and *What* and *How* Questions.
- Q Crossover Situation Cards

Set-Up

Participants sit in a circle. The Cue Cards are given to three people who are seated next to each other. They hold the cards face out to the group.

Procedure

1. The leader reads a Crossover Situation Card.
2. The three Cue Card holders respond, each in the style/response on his/her card.
3. The cards then are passed one person to the left and the drill is repeated.
4. Make the drill more challenging by setting a time limit for responses.

Example

A: *Crossover*: You ignored my feelings when you bought a car without discussing it with me.

B: *Insight*: I felt left out when I found out you bought a car without discussing it with me. I would have preferred talking with you before you made the purchase.

C: *How/What question*: What motivated you to go out and buy the car without my input? How did you come to that decision?

Discussion

1. What stood out for you as you did this exercise?
2. What difference could these skills make for you?

Conclusions

Expressing oneself in non-provocative ways is hardest when emotions run high, including emotions from being rushed. Practice can make a big difference.