

Chapter 1

The relationship dilemma

The title of this book may have already created some internal discord for you. If you are a kind soul then, like most people, you've probably assumed that it is inappropriate and manipulative to try and change the people you love. You may have even dabbled at trying to do this at some point and have some painful failed attempts to show for it, seemingly confirming that your assumption is accurate.

Relationship expert George Blair-West reinforces this common suspicion that trying to change others is not okay. He says, 'You don't have a right to change your partner, but you have a responsibility to tell them what it is that you need for a relationship to work for you.' However, while this may be the accepted wisdom on the subject, even under gentle scrutiny this statement simply does not hold up. It really makes no sense.

Communicating what you need without enforcing the consequences of what you need not being met is a complete waste of oxygen. Worse still, without leverage, what you are actually telling the other person is that you don't need these things at all. Therefore, you are creating the exact opposite of the stated outcome and training the other person to treat you poorly.

To get the important things you need to have the relationship you desire unequivocally requires the other person to change. This undoes the first part of Blair-West's statement. If it is okay to need things from each other, then it is also okay to require change to get what you need at certain times, too.

The issue is that change is hard! We are inherently motivated to avoid pain and pursue pleasure; so, if left to our own devices, we can remain in our comfort zones even when they are dysfunctional.

Change requires extra motivation. In the absence of an internal reason to improve, you must provide an external one. If you don't help those you love deal with their dysfunction and improve the quality of the way they show up, this will be bad for you, then it will be bad for your relationship, then it will also be bad for the other person. No-one ever goes into a relationship hoping for any of these outcomes, yet this is so often the state of play to which things descend.

The relationship timeline

When you examine the nature of how relationships develop, it is clear that all relationships have an inception point when something brings two people together. Friends connect; lovers collide; employment begins; a child is born. From this point, the natural trajectory is towards each other. The relational magnetism of rapport draws you together.

A mother and her newborn child bond deeply, losing sight of all else around them. New friends enjoy the beauty of life, love and laughter. Partners are consumed by the fire of new love. New employment brings the thrill of meaning and responsibility.

Deep and rapid rapport is formed around sameness. This can be called the honeymoon period of the relationship timeline. There is only good. There is only connection and kinship. The space between you is perfectly clean.

Then the first problem arises. There is no escaping the inevitability of conflict. If two people agree on everything or are the same in every way, then one of them is not necessary. There is nothing unusual or wrong with this conflict.

The two-year-old child starts asserting her own will instead of complying peacefully. The friend makes a joke at your expense, takes advantage of you or pressures you into something uncomfortable. Your boss overpromises and underdelivers. Your lover snaps at you, neglects your needs or requires some space.

The honeymoon comes to an abrupt end, and quite suddenly you've arrived at the first pivot point of your relationship. What happens next determines everything about your future together. In every case, there are only two paths that can emerge from this place.

Intimacy or arrangement

In these seminal moments, you have only two choices: move through the conflict effectively towards intimacy, or become blocked by the conflict and diverge towards an arrangement. Either the space between you is clean and your connection is pure, or the space is contaminated and there is stuff between you – meaning you now need to manage the relationship.

Intimacy means the relationship is as good as possible. Arrangements are the result of having to find a way to continue making the relationship work on some level even though the pure trust, connection and rapport are no longer present. How you handle conflict determines which outcome you will have.

Handling conflict effectively always requires you to fight for change. The nature of all conflict is that something is causing a disruption to your natural state of rapport together. Something is separating you, causing you to no longer feel as though you are on

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the same team. You are against me and I am against you. The space between us is no longer clean. Therefore, in order for rapport to be regained, things must change. If things are to continue as is, there is now stuff between us that is different and incongruent. Not only is it divergent, if left unaddressed it becomes repulsive. There is now danger. You must now defend or attack.

Conflict resolution is an essential skill for anyone wishing to have real relationships. Without the ability to fight for change there cannot be intimacy. Intimacy will be lost. There is nothing surer.

All effective conflict resolution comes down to one word: leverage. Either you fight with leverage or without it. With leverage you move through conflict to intimacy. Without leverage you are stopped and diverged at conflict and move into arrangements.

The concept of leverage is very simple, yet the process of acquiring it is hard. The great news is that once you've got it, your key relationships can only improve. Leverage makes way for things to get better and better. Without it, things can only stay the same or get worse.

Either you find a way to engage effectively and move through the conflict having resolved the issue thoroughly; *or* you respond ineffectively and messily, and the issue is not resolved. Option A means you move forward into intimacy. There is nothing contaminating the space between you. Option B means you diverge into an arrangement. There is stuff between you and the space is not clean. While this second path is by far the more common of the two approaches, it is a recipe for great suffering.

Unnecessary suffering

Life is suffering. The sooner you come to terms with that, the easier it is to make sense of your struggles and choose the kind of suffering you want.

In his book *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*, Mark Manson says, “If suffering is inevitable, if our problems in life are unavoidable, then the question we should be asking is not “How do I stop suffering?” but “Why am I suffering and for what purpose?””

Although suffering is a central part of being human, not all suffering is equal. Some suffering comes directly from ignorance, stupidity, poor choices and reluctance to accept wisdom. It is self-inflicted in the worst possible way. There is meaningful suffering and then there is unnecessary suffering. Not knowing how to change the people you love definitely leads to the second type of suffering.

Using whatever skills and knowledge I have to alleviate this unnecessary suffering in some way is perhaps the biggest motivation behind all my work to date.

Understanding that life is suffering can really help your decision-making process. For example, if you want to fix your marriage, you’ll face suffering, but if you don’t fix it, you will still suffer. The path to business success is difficult and full of suffering, but you’ll suffer greatly if you fail, too. To face your fears brings suffering, but to let them consume you is also suffering. If you want to train for a marathon, you’ll suffer, but if you sit on the lounge and never push your body, you’ll still end up suffering.

You’re transformed through your suffering when you choose the right kind of suffering.

When you set your heart and mind on the things that really matter and become willing to endure the cost, no matter how hard, your suffering becomes beautifully redemptive for you and those around you.

If life is suffering, your mission then is to choose suffering that is meaningful rather than suffering for nothing. When it comes specifically to the suffering you experience in relationships, the balance is definitely skewed towards the unnecessary kind. Hence the need for this conversation.

If you don't learn about conflict resolution, neediness, insecurity, rules of engagement, responsibility and leverage you will suffer greatly – yet all of this is entirely unnecessary.

You can work this stuff out. I promise. Unnecessary relationship suffering fits firmly in the category of predictable problems with predictable solutions. Repairing weakened relationships to full strength again and cleaning the space between you and those you love is a solvable problem.

Even if your past and current relationship experiences have convinced you that tolerating some level of annoying, dysfunctional or even toxic behaviour is natural and necessary, I'll show you how untrue that is.

Just because there seems to be no viable alternative – in spite of your best efforts to find one – doesn't mean you have to lower your expectations and give up hope. There is a better way.

This book addresses the painful problem that for most people, the quality of their most important relationships is not great. Even more painful is the knowledge that despite their best efforts, things are staying the same or getting worse.

The leverage model is the solution to this problem. It is the framework for not only saving relationships that are in danger of ending but radically improving the quality of these relationships to the level you deserve and desire.

The real solution: the leverage model

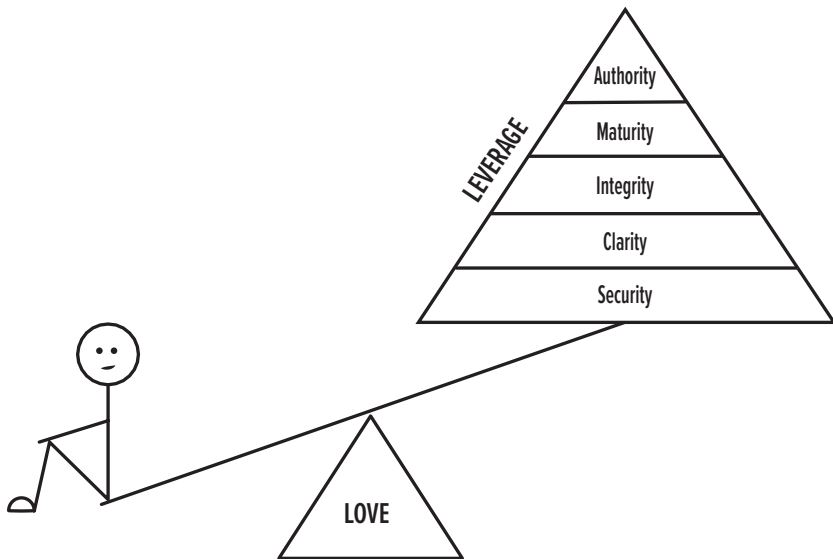
As you will discover in this book, your ability to change those you love comes from the combination of these five building blocks in this order:

1. *Security*: Eradicate insecurity so that you know you deserve to be loved.

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2. *Clarity*: Know what you deserve; be precise about what you desire.
3. *Integrity*: Before you demand change from others, first demand change from yourself.
4. *Maturity*: Negotiate win/win like an adult so that you both get what you want.
5. *Authority*: Hold the line to complete the conflict and change process even in the midst of great resistance.

I call this the leverage model. Each part of this book explores one of the five of the model's building blocks.



The fulcrum – love

In the diagram of the leverage model, you can see that for the lever to be effective, it requires a fulcrum.

This whole model rests on the fulcrum of love. That means love is the leverage multiplier. The more love there is in the relationship, the more leverage. The less love between you and the other person, the

less ability you have to change them. This is an important distinction to come to terms with before you go trying to change people.

Demanding change of a complete stranger with whom you share nothing in common is unlikely to yield anything other than the direct instruction for you to sod off. There is no love between you; therefore, there is no reason for them to even listen to you, let alone do what you are asking of them. There is no reason for you to make changes to the things that you don't like in them in order to keep the space clean between you – because there is no space between you. It doesn't matter how much security, clarity, integrity, maturity or authority you have, because if there is no mutual love, there is also no leverage for change.

On the other end of the scale are those we have the most love for and who reciprocate that love. Your partner is most likely to occupy pole position because romantic love involves the most amount of choice: I choose you and you also must choose me for this to work. It is the love you have for each other that motivates you to try to keep the relationship strong and pure.

If you love each other, you don't actually want to hurt each other or for things between you to become poisonous. You also don't want the relationship to end. This means when one of you comes to the other demanding improvement, you've got something to work with. If you bring a serious complaint to someone who loves you – even if they are offended, afraid or don't know how to do any different – they must rethink their part in the relationship, otherwise they may ultimately lose you.

While you may have immense love for your kids or parents, you didn't choose them, nor did they choose you. Good friends are chosen, but it's likely there is less love in these relationships than with your partner or family. You might like your work colleague, have respect for your boss and tolerate your acquaintances. As you move further along the love spectrum, you naturally have less love between you and so less ability to demand change successfully.

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This book is only concerned with the process of how to change the people you love and who love you back.

How to change the people you love, with leverage and without

Below I list what becomes possible with leverage, and also the painful reality of what happens in your key relationships without it.

Table 1: Life with and without leverage

<i>Without leverage</i>	<i>With leverage</i>
Arrangement	Intimacy
Shame	Wholeness
Neediness	Being the prize
Guardedness	Presence and unguardedness
Emotionality	Rationality
Messiness	Cleanness
Ambiguity	Clarity
Blame	Responsibility
Hypocrisy	Wholeheartedness
Trust	Self actualisation
Bluffing	Consequences
Rapport with others	Rapport with self
Compromise	Negotiation
Passive aggressiveness	Assertiveness
Childishness	Maturity
Divergence	Unity
Historic agreements	Updated agreement
Resentment	Peace
Space between you is poisoned	Space between you is clean

Leverage

Throughout this book I will unpack these differences in more detail and give you the strategies required to maximise leverage and therefore your ability to improve the quality of your most important relationships.

Rather than hoping, wishing or praying for improvement in your relationships, the leverage process facilitates inevitable improvement. Join me now as we explore the magic of leverage.