



WORKSHOP FACILITATOR GUIDE

www.marriagemirror.com

© 2026 The Marriage Mirror™. All rights reserved. Registered participants and facilitators of the Marriage Mirror™ program are granted permission to download, print, and reproduce copies of Marriage Mirror resources for personal, non-commercial use within their household or workshop session. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted for public distribution, resale, or commercial use without the prior written permission of the publisher.




Disclaimer: THE MARRIAGE MIRROR™ Workbook is an educational resource designed to improve communication and relationships. It is not intended to serve as a substitute for professional counseling, therapy, or medical advice. If you or your partner are experiencing serious relationship issues or mental health concerns, please consult a licensed professional.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The Workshop Facilitator Guide is designed to serve a dual purpose:

- **As a Study Tool:** The document presents the content of the Marriage Mirror member portal, with additional research background, video link addresses, instruction cues, and leader scripts. The member portal unlocks and locks as you move through it. Use this guide as a study tool before the workshop, to deeply internalize the material and present with personal confidence.
- **As a Podium Playbook:** During the live event, this guide acts as your chronological master script. References to the Attendee Worksheets are woven sequentially into the timeline so you can easily keep the room synchronized.

Table of Contents

Preparing for Your Marriage Mirror Workshop	iv
Introduction to The Marriage Mirror™	vi
 Pillar One: Learn to Listen Effectively.....	1
Identify Your Listening Habits	1
Review & Discuss Results	6
Review & Discuss Results: The Compliments Break	8
Set Your Listening Goal	10
Design Your Listening Action Plan.....	12
Visualize Your Listening Success.....	18
Affirm Your Partner	19
Execute Your Listening Plan	21
 Pillar Two: Learn to Speak Effectively	23
Identify Your Speaking Habits	23
Review & Discuss Results	26
Set Your Speaking Goal	28
Design Your Speaking Action Plan.....	30
Visualize Your Speaking Success	38
Affirm Your Partner	39
Execute Your Speaking Plan	39
 Pillar Three: Learn to Choose Effective Environments	41
Identify Your Environment Habits.....	41
Review & Discuss Results	45
Set Your Environment Goal	47
Design Your Environment Action Plan	49
Visualize Success Creating the Right Environment	56
Affirm Your Partner	57
Execute Your Environment Plan	57
Conclusion & Next Steps	59
Congratulations!	59
Marriage Mirror Workshop Feedback Form	60

Preparing for Your Marriage Mirror Workshop

Thank you for helping to build successful marriages! This essential guide provides the structure for an engaging and spiritually rich workshop experience.

Technology and Program Access

The visual roadmap and videos for this program are hosted online. Ensure your presenter screen setup is completely ready before participants arrive.

- **Registration Check:** Ensure each participating couple completes paid registration at MarriageMirror.com prior to the session date to save time. Do not allow any non-registered attendees.
- **Display Setup:** Connect your laptop to a large screen (or projector). Log in to your member dashboard at MarriageMirror.com before the session and display the program on the large screen so all participants can easily view the content.
- **Flow Management:** Be prepared to pause the program frequently to allow time for individual assessments, couples discussions and group sharing.
- **Participant Material Flow:** This workshop is designed for a focused, distraction-free experience using the physical Attendee Worksheets packet. Participants do not need to use their personal devices during the session. However, if any couples prefer to log into their online member portal during discussion breaks to update their digital profiles or to access additional program resources, they may use a smartphone or tablet.
- **Printing:** Print one Attendee Worksheets packet per participant. If you are only covering the Listening Pillar, print pages 1-16. For double-sided printing, print pages 15 and 16 single-sided.



Logistics & Setting the Environment

The right environment is essential for open communication and group dynamics.

- **Group Size & Selection:** Aim for 6-8 couples for optimal discussion and interaction. Ask for God's assistance in choosing participants.
- **Location & Privacy:** Choose a space that provides comfort and privacy for sensitive discussions and accommodates your large screen setup.
- **Seating Arrangement:** Arrange chairs, preferably in a semicircle, to facilitate eye contact and group engagement.
- **Hospitality:** Plan a time for simple refreshments (e.g., coffee, tea, water, and light pastries) to foster a relaxed atmosphere.



Strategic Decision: Workshop Models

The Marriage Mirror program offers two effective models for group delivery. Decide which model you will follow before promoting the workshop, to set clear expectations for time commitment.



- **Model A: Single-Session Kickstart (Recommended for Busy Groups)**
 - Focus: Complete only the Listening Pillar together in one focused four-hour session.
 - Follow-Up: Couples complete the Speaking and Environment Pillars privately at home.
 - Benefit: Low time commitment increases participation. Strong listening skills are established, setting them up for success on the remaining Pillars at home.
- **Model B: Three-Session Deep Dive (Recommended for High-Commitment Groups)**
 - Focus: Complete all three Pillars (Listening, Speaking, Environment) over three separate four-hour meetings.
 - Schedule: Space each session 3–4 weeks apart to allow couples time to implement and reinforce their personalized Action Plans before moving to the next Pillar.
 - Benefit: Allows the leader to monitor progress, address challenges in real-time, and leverage the group's mutual support throughout the entire program.

Mindset and Group Dynamics

The group setting enhances the learning process, but its true power comes from its spiritual foundation.

- **Spiritual Foundation:** Pray specifically for the session, the couples attending, and the successful outcomes in their marriages. Please inform MM.com of your session(s) so our team can be praying for you.
- **Group Advantage:** The mutual encouragement, camaraderie, and enjoyment of shared experiences can greatly enhance the learning process. Privacy is maintained as participants complete the personal work on their own devices.



Leader Preparation & Follow-up: Scanning this Workbook beforehand is helpful but not strictly required, as the online program will consistently guide the session flow. Please email completed Feedback Forms to info@marriagemirror.com to help us continue to improve the Marriage Mirror program.

Introduction to The Marriage Mirror™

Developed by Arthur K. Robertson, Ph.D.

The Marriage Mirror was born out of the deep concern of its founder, Arthur K. Robertson, Ph.D., over the declining rate of successful marriages. Early in his career as a Senior Pastor, he witnessed too many divorces among couples he had married, leading him to ask: “**What is it that makes marriages work?**” He discontinued performing ceremonies in 1975 to focus on this question.

Robertson concluded that the root of all major marital issues—including sexual dysfunction, money conflicts, and problems with children—was fundamentally **poor communication**.

To develop a solution, Robertson secured fifty years of research on effective listening from Dr. Lyman K. Steil, the “International Ambassador of Listening.” This deep research was coupled with Robertson's own experience as a corporate consultant. His core methodology, which includes a statistically proven listening inventory, showed effectiveness in retest analyses of thousands of professionals.

Across his listening workshops, a clear pattern emerged: the vast majority of managers prioritized improving communication with their spouse over communication with their colleagues. This powerful revelation fueled the creation of THE MARRIAGE MIRROR™.

Initially designed as an over-the-counter resource for couples, the program was later modified for use on the Internet, making its powerful, research-backed methodology accessible everywhere. As Dr. Robertson explains, the entire program is designed to build a rock-solid marriage upon three foundational communication pillars that are taught and reinforced throughout the course:

1. **Listening:** Discover how you listen to each other and build an effective listening plan.
2. **Speaking:** Learn how to talk with one another and build a better speaking plan.
3. **Environment:** Understand the key role your environment plays in important discussions.

Welcome & Orientation Facilitator Script

This workshop is your shared space to reflect, connect, and practice. I will be guiding you through an enjoyable process that will build your marriage, pausing the screen whenever it is time to turn your attention to your worksheet packets.

As you complete your worksheets, remember that you aren't just filling out forms—you are holding up a mirror to your relationship, breaking old patterns, and intentionally building a communication framework that will protect your marriage for a lifetime. Writing out your thoughts is a statistically proven way to turn your intentions into lasting action steps. God bless you as we proceed!



This video may be used to promote the Marriage Mirror Workshop.

VIDEO: Marriage Mirror Invitation

vimeo.com/1180591750

Dr. Art Robertson

(Located on the Marriage Mirror home page)



Build mutual understanding, trust, and relationship satisfaction by cultivating the art of listening.



VIDEO: Prepare to begin

vimeo.com/1180591736

First Things First: A Foundation for Your Marriage

Phyllis Hendry Halverson shares why the "50/50" marriage is a myth and how inviting God's love to be your first priority transforms how you see and love your spouse.

PILLAR ONE: LEARN TO LISTEN EFFECTIVELY

We all know we should listen better, but most of us don't. The cost of poor listening in our relationships, especially with our partners, is enormous—eroded trust, missed connections, and unnecessary conflict. But the good news is: listening is a skill you can learn and improve.

To guide you through the Marriage Mirror program, our Progress Bar will serve as a visual roadmap, marking your progress through 7 clear milestones as you move from identifying your habits to executing your action plan.



Identify Your Listening Habits

Start by identifying the listening habits that hinder and replace them with skills that sustain.

be present

"Excellent communication doesn't just happen naturally. It is a product of process, skills, climate, relationship and hard work." -Pat McMillan, author, CEO

The Marriage Mirror

Without training, we listen at a fraction of our potential, missing crucial nuances and opportunities for deeper connection. Imagine the difference effective listening could make in your marriage. It's not just about hearing the words; it's about truly understanding your partner's thoughts and feelings. By learning and practicing specific techniques, you can transform your listening skills and cultivate more fulfilling happiness in your marriage.

The Marriage Mirror offers a clear, structured path to building a rock-solid marriage. Here's what to expect: Your work will focus on The Three Central Pillars: **Listening**, **Speaking**, and **Environment** – the essential supports for an enduring foundation. The core assessments, review process, and action planning for each pillar require approximately 2 hours of focused work, plus 21 days to integrate the skills. As you follow the same structured path through each pillar, you'll quickly begin enjoying improved understanding, mutual trust, and marital satisfaction.

We hope you enjoy the Marriage Mirror experience and the positive results it brings. You'll have access for a full year, giving you the opportunity to retake the Mirror, reinforce your learning, and celebrate your progress. When you commit to this process, your rock-solid marriage will stand the test of time and trouble. Let's get started!

-Art Robertson, Ph.D., Founder of the Marriage Mirror




Signal Your Presence: Lean toward your partner to show they have your full attention.

This visual path corresponds directly to your Progress Bar, showing you the milestones you'll encounter along the way.

Path to Stronger Communication



 **PRAYER:** *"Heavenly Father, we come to You as we begin this journey together. We thank You for our marriage and for the desire You've placed in our hearts to grow closer. As we honestly consider our habits, give us the courage to see ourselves clearly and the humility to hear our partner's heart. Soften our spirits and help us remember that You are the true foundation of our home. Amen."*

INSTRUCTIONS: Complete two assessments each, scoring yourself and your partner on your listening habits. These assessments provide the data necessary to identify your relationship's unique strengths and growth areas. The completion of all four assessments will unlock the next step, in which you will prepare to view and discuss your results in a safe, constructive environment.



VIDEO: Listening Skills Assessment

vimeo.com/1180590564

Ready to Listen Differently?

Join Dr. Art Robertson and “Listening Legend” Dr. Lyman K. Manny Steil to discover the four key purposes of communication. Learn how specialized training can transform your relationship into a source of deeper trust and intimacy.

Watch the Full Interview: For more teaching and insight on effective listening, you can view the full, unabridged conversation with Dr. Steil here: <https://youtu.be/8Ze98hf5Gjl>

Production Credits: Special thanks to HighSpeedLuke.com for providing the interview footage with Dr. Steil.

(Direct attendees to record their scores on their worksheets and/or member portal.)

<h3 style="text-align: center;">Listening – Assessment of Self</h3> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>(How I perceive my own listening habits)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">5 = ALMOST ALWAYS; 4 = USUALLY; 3 = SOMETIMES; 2 = SELDOM; 1 = ALMOST NEVER</p>		NAME:				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	I can sense when my partner is emotionally upset.					
2	Even when I am excited or upset, I can focus on my partner and listen.					
3	When my partner speaks, I give my undivided attention.					
4	I pay more attention to what my partner means than to how the message is conveyed.					
5	I ask questions to clarify what I do not understand.					
6	I listen for my partner's main ideas rather than getting lost in the details.					
7	I look for something of value in what my partner says even if I don't agree with everything.					
8	I wait without interrupting until my partner is through, then pause, think and respond.					
9	I communicate an understanding of my partner's thoughts and feelings before stating a contrary opinion.					
10	I do not change the subject until either my partner is finished or we have agreed to change the subject.					
11	When my partner criticizes me, I recognize and admit to anything that is true.					
12	In conversations with my partner, I listen more than speak.					
13	I observe my partner's facial expressions (without staring) while my partner speaks.					
14	I notice the nonverbal messages given by my partner's body language and physical cues.					
Subtotal each column						
Total Score						

<p style="text-align: center;">Listening – Assessment of Partner <i>(How I perceive my partner’s listening habits)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">5 = ALMOST ALWAYS; 4 = USUALLY; 3 = SOMETIMES; 2 = SELDOM; 1 = ALMOST NEVER</p>		NAME:				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	My partner can sense when I am emotionally upset.					
2	My partner can focus and listen to me even when my partner is excited or emotionally upset.					
3	When I am speaking my partner gives me undivided attention.					
4	My partner pays more attention to what I mean than to how I convey it.					
5	My partner asks questions to clarify what is not understood.					
6	My partner listens for my main ideas rather than getting lost in the details.					
7	My partner looks for something of value in what I say, even if there was disagreement over some of what I said.					
8	My partner waits without interrupting until I am through, then pauses, thinks and responds.					
9	My partner communicates an understanding of my thoughts and feelings before stating a contrary opinion.					
10	My partner does not change the subject until either I am finished or we have agreed to change the subject.					
11	When criticized, my partner is able to recognize and admit to anything that is true.					
12	In conversations with me, my partner listens more than speaks.					
13	My partner observes my facial expressions (without staring) while I speak.					
14	My partner notices the nonverbal messages given by my body language and physical cues.					
Subtotal each column						
Total Score						



VIDEO: Guide for Assessment Review & Discussion

vimeo.com/1181016423

Unlocking Relational Intelligence with Dr. Bruce Terpstra

With over 40 years of ministry and counseling experience, Dr. Terpstra has trained more than 20,000 people worldwide in relational intelligence. As the founder of the Consentia Group and an expert in soul discipleship, he brings a deep, research-backed perspective on how to heal and strengthen the marital bond.



Review & Discuss Results

Review your "Listening Mirror" to create a path toward deeper intimacy.

"Listen with curiosity. Speak with honesty. Act with integrity. The greatest problem with communication is we don't listen to understand. We listen to reply. When we listen with curiosity, we don't listen with the intent to reply. We listen for what's behind the words."

-Roy T. Bennett, author

The greatest gift you can give to your partner is to listen carefully.

With focus and training, you can learn to be an effective listener. Your Listening Assessment Review gives you the specific tools needed to stop the vicious cycle of poor communication and develop new listening habits that build understanding, trust, and deeper intimacy.

The Power of the Mirror

"You cannot see yourself clearly until you see yourself through the eyes of others" (Ellen DeGeneres). Your partner is your "mirror," revealing communication blind spots and highlighting where you listen well. The Marriage Mirror gives you the invaluable opportunity to see yourself through your spouse's eyes, allowing you to identify perceived gaps and reinforce your strengths. This isn't just a review; it's the launchpad for your Action Plan. You are on the path to create a new, rewarding communication relationship and witness God's transformative work in your marriage.



Stay Composed: Control your emotions even when the conversation gets heated.

Advance Preparation for Meeting Together

To ensure your assessment review is productive and positive, complete these steps *before* meeting with your partner:

1. **Choose the Time and Place:** Select a time and place where you will be uninterrupted for 45 minutes to review and compare your assessments.
2. **Collect Compliments:** In advance, collect at least five genuine compliments you will give your partner. Focus on positive attributes, behaviors, and recent actions.
3. **Prepare Your Mindset:** Commit mentally and emotionally to approaching the discussion with humility and curiosity. Your sole purpose is to understand your partner's perspective, not to defend your own.

On-Demand Guidance: During your discussion, you'll have instant access to Discussion Hints and Motivation Tips for every skill. These are designed to help you navigate emotional undercurrents and ground your conversation in timeless truths. Just click the "Hint" or "Tip" icon during your review if you feel stuck or need inspiration.

To see how this works, here is a preview of the guidance available during your review (using Skill #8 as a sample).

LISTENING SKILL	DISCUSSION HINT	MOTIVATION TIP
I will wait without interrupting until my partner is through, then I will pause, think and respond.	Interrupting is disrupting and corrupting. Waiting shows respect, avoids misunderstandings, and captures the full message. Give your partner space to finish and yourself time to reflect. Try passing an object or setting a timer (e.g. 2-5 minutes) to signal who listens; no interruptions allowed.	"The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply" (Stephen R. Covey). "The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause" (Mark Twain).

If you'd like to browse ahead, you can find the master lists of Positive Skills with Hints and Tips in your member Resources* tab. If you're feeling a bit nervous, also check out our Tips and Common Questions for advice on handling tough conversations.

(*NOTE: Links will open in a new window. To return to your member portal, simply click the browser tab at the top of your screen labeled "Progress Bar.")

Review & Discuss Results: The Compliments Break

Goal: Ground the room in mutual appreciation and love before couples review potentially challenging assessment scores.

Facilitator Script

Part 1: Icebreaker – Time to Have Some Fun

Think back to when you were first dating... How did you meet? What do you remember about your first date or your first kiss? Do you remember what it was like before you had any kids running around the house?

(Leader Note: Share a brief, warm personal story of your own here to break the ice.)

Who would like to share a fun or enjoyable experience you had with your spouse?

Part 2: Exercise – Speaking Words of Life

Now, let's take a few minutes to focus on encouragement. I'd like each of you to look at the Compliments Collection page in your worksheets packet and jot down five specific things you deeply appreciate or admire about your spouse. If you need a little inspiration, consider how your spouse reflects the Fruit of the Spirit in your marriage:

- **Love:** *Have they ever extended unconditional grace or done something kind for you when you felt you least deserved it?*
- **Joy:** *Do they bring a positive, uplifting spirit into your home, even during difficult seasons?*
- **Peace:** *Do they bring a sense of calm to unexpected or stressful situations?*
- **Patience (Long-suffering):** *This means having a 'long temper' – giving you room to make mistakes without keeping score.*
- **Gentleness:** *This is characterized by humility and quiet strength. Think of a powerful wild horse that has been beautifully trained – retaining all its strength, but choosing to submit it to a greater purpose. That is how Jesus loves us.*
- **Goodness:** *A heart of deep compassion and kindness that mirrors Christ.*
- **Faithfulness:** *Standing firm in their commitment, trusting both you and God through every season."*

Part 3: Reflection:

Now, take about 5 to 7 minutes of quiet time to write your five compliments. Remember, you are just writing them down for now; you'll keep them tucked away to share face-to-face with your partner a bit later in the workshop.

After you click **Begin Review**, you will enter your Listening Discussion Covenant. As part of this, you'll be prompted to share the thoughtful compliments you've prepared to set a positive stage for your discussion. Then, click **Begin Now** to see your assessment responses. Use the Discussion Hints and Motivation Tips to spark meaningful dialogue and weave God's wisdom into your marriage. Enjoy your review!

"If only we had been given the power to see ourselves as others see us." - Robert Burns

Our Listening Discussion Covenant

Guiding Wisdom:

- “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.” (James 1:19)
- “Listen carefully before you answer.” (Proverbs 18:13)
- “Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom for the future.” (Proverbs 19:20)

Our Commitment: We affirm that this covenant creates a safe, loving space for growth—not judgment. Our partner is our "mirror," revealing blind spots and strengths. We trust God to transform our marriage through this conversation!

Why We Commit

1. Prioritize our relationship.
2. Feel valued, loved, and heard.
3. Ignite trust, romance, and intimacy.
4. Strengthen our bond forever.

Non-Negotiable Ground Rules

1. **Timing:** No meeting if tired, hungry, irritable, or intoxicated.
2. **Mindset:** Zero complaints, criticisms, or disappointment - focus on growth!
3. **Tone:** Use a warm, friendly voice and caring words.
4. **Body Language:** Sit side-by-side (not across), smile, eye contact, open posture.
5. **Mutual Goal:** Understand - not prove we're right.

Our Plan for Discussion

Our plan ensures our discussion brings grace, clarity, and a path to growth:

1. Agree on who begins sharing their assessment answers first.
2. Identify similarities and differences in our perceptions.
3. Celebrate the strengths and successes of how we currently communicate.
4. Define the desired changes we both want to make in our communication.
5. Offer positive ideas and support for helping each other improve our skills.

The Covenant Promise

You are about to step into your Marriage Mirror discussion. This is a time for grace and growth, not for defense or blame. The Covenant Promise secures a productive environment for your discussion. Listen as Dr. Art Robertson shares a brief inspirational message and then guides you through the Covenant ceremony. After the vow is read aloud, kindly respond by saying “I do.”

(Prefer to read? This companion article follows along with the audio message. [See Resources tab: Articles – “Marriage as a Divine Covenant.”](#))



AUDIO: Covenant Ceremony

marriagemirror.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Marriage_Mirror_May_2026.mp3

Step 1: Vow – Share a mutual vow of honor. *(Pause the audio file after the vows, at 4:25.)*

Step 2: Affirmation – Share your prepared compliments. *(When finished, resume the audio.)*

Step 3: Prayer – Join in a prayer of blessing.

Click here for a printable copy of the Discussion Covenant to sign. [\(See Resources tab.\)](#)

Ready to Begin: Once you have completed your Vows, Compliments, and Prayer, check the acknowledgment box below to activate the "Begin Now" button.

(Direct attendees to reference their worksheets or member portal to review and discuss their listening assessment results.)



Set Your Listening Goal

Focus your attention on one specific skill to improve your marital communication.

“You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time.” -M. Scott Peck

Your deep discussion is complete! Now let’s pivot from discussion to design as you prepare to create your personalized Listening Action Plan. Your next step is to utilize your assessment results and the feedback from your partner to focus your attention on improving a specific listening skill.

1. Pinpoint Your Growth Goal

View your Scoring Chart

(Direct attendees to view their personalized Scoring Chart in the member portal or reference their assessment worksheets.)

This personalized chart provides a visual comparison of your listening assessment scores, highlighting your strengths and areas for growth at a glance. Use it to pinpoint specific positive listening skills you’d like to focus on developing.

Your Average Score is a crucial snapshot of your current listening habits. Use the chart below to quickly determine your Listener Category and understand where your focus needs to be in your Action Plan.

AVERAGE SCORE	LISTENER CATEGORY	MEANING
4.5 - 5.0	Excellent	You consistently practice positive listening habits.
3.5 - 4.4	Good	You generally practice positive listening, but have room for to refine your skills.
2.5 - 3.4	Average	Your listening skills are inconsistent; you need an active plan to build better habits.
1.0 - 2.4	Needs Improvement	You seldom demonstrate positive listening skills or habits.

2. Choose a Listening Skill to work on

Your assessment scores and partner's feedback have pinpointed your areas for growth. Use this data to guide your selection:

- 1) **Narrow the Focus:** Based on your Scoring Chart results and discussion, choose 1 to 3 potential skills you're each willing to work on.
- 2) **Commit to One:** Together, decide on one specific skill for each of you to improve during the next 21 days. This step will be recorded in your action plan.
- 3) **Jot Down Your Skill Number:** Each listening skill in your results is numbered. Please write down the number of your chosen skill now. You will need this number in the next task to easily find skill-specific examples and measurable steps to help build your Action Plan.



Seek the Gold: Look for the "1% Truth" and "2% application" in everything your partner shares.

A Note on Growth: While you are choosing one primary skill to focus on for your Action Plan, remember that every positive habit you build strengthens your marriage. Focusing on one goal helps you turn a new skill into a lasting habit without feeling overwhelmed. You will receive additional tools later to help you integrate all the skills.

Now that you've each chosen a listening skill to work on, you've already determined the first step in your Action Plan – Setting your Goal. But "a goal is just a dream unless you have a plan to achieve it." When you're ready to continue, you'll be instructed how to create a workable plan of action with measurable steps that will help you improve your listening skills and enjoy better communication with your partner.

TIP: Your body speaks before you do. Read the article [Understanding Facial Expressions](#) to understand the involuntary messages in your facial expressions, and then explore [The Architecture of Connection vs. Conflict](#) to learn how your overall posture can either build a "Bridge" or a "Fortress" between you and your partner. (See Resources tab: Articles)



VIDEO: Designing Your Action Plan

vimeo.com/1180589848

A Plan for Success with Dr. Ken Blanchard

Join world-renowned author & leadership expert Dr. Ken Blanchard to move your relationship from "thinking about change" to actually making it happen. Use this simple, measurable action plan to bridge the gap between where you are and the intimacy you desire.

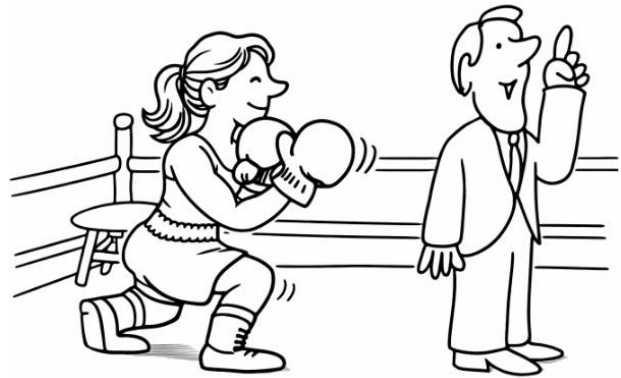


Design Your Listening Action Plan

Establish a proven strategy to make your chosen skill a natural part of your life.

“Being heard is so close to being loved that to the average person, they are almost indistinguishable.” -David W. Augsburger, author of Caring Enough to Hear & Be Heard

Fantastic work! Now comes the exciting part – mapping out exactly how your new listening skills will become a natural, thriving part of your marriage. Your 7-Step Action Plan is the well-defined path to the deeper connection you’re aiming for.



Yield the Floor: Don’t fight for air time; let your partner finish their thought.

1. Schedule Your Planning Session

Choose a time and place to spend **30-45 minutes** together uninterrupted. This dedicated time will allow you to craft a crystal-clear plan, ensuring you both know precisely what steps to take to reach your goals.

2. Your Guided Action Plan

Creating a plan for change shouldn’t feel like homework, so we’ve done the heavy lifting. To make this as easy as possible, each step of your Action Plan is pre-loaded with specific suggestions for every skill. As you walk through the steps, you’ll find plenty of examples to choose from. You can simply copy and paste the example given for your chosen skill, strategically pick the ones that resonate with your marriage, or use them as a springboard to quickly jot down your own.

Here is a glimpse of how the pre-loaded examples will support you (using Skill #8 as a sample).

SECTION OF YOUR PLAN	SKILL-SPECIFIC EXAMPLES
Identify Your Goal	I will wait without interrupting until my partner is through, then I will pause, think and respond.
Prepare for Action	Press my tongue to the roof of my mouth or sip water while they speak. Take a deep breath and count to 3 in my head before I reply. Practice “STOP”: Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed.
Establish Observable Indicators	There is a clear 2-second gap after they finish. My partner never has to say "Let me finish".

NEXT STEP: Prepare Your Listening Action Plan (45 minutes)

“There are no uninteresting subjects. There are only uninterested people.” –GK Chesterton.

While you wait for your session: Read this article to learn the benefits of listening with interest. [\(See Articles: Break a Habit that Breaks Up Marriages.\)](#)

Design Your Action Plan


Establish New Habits: Your 21-Day Roadmap

Active listening not only complements effective speaking but also serves as essential preparation for it. You've identified your strengths and habits; now it's time to solidify those insights into real-world change. This 7-Step Action Plan turns your desire for connection into a tangible, day-to-day reality. You will write measurable, observable, obtainable goals that will keep you moving toward quality marital communication and a more blessed marital relationship.

Principles for Success

PRACTICE: It takes at least 21 days to lock in a new habit. To secure your success, commit to engaging with your new skill throughout the day—at home, at work, and in public. If a conversation doesn't naturally occur, "practice" by taking two minutes to visualize a specific upcoming interaction where you will apply the skill.

THE SECRET SAUCE: Agree to recognize and encourage each other whenever an attempt is made to practice. Mutual reinforcement is what secures long-term success.

 **Prayer for the Journey:** *"God, we thank You for the specific areas of growth You have revealed. As we commit to these new skills, we ask for Your strength. We know that real change takes time and practice. Please guide our steps, help us to be patient with ourselves and each other, and give us the discipline to stay focused on the goals we've set. Amen."*

Let's begin crafting your action plan!

Action Plan Steps

(Instruct attendees to complete their Action Plan on their worksheets and/or member portal.)

Step: 1 – Identify Your Goal

Record the skill you have chosen to develop. Describe the desired skill as simply and clearly as possible.

Example: Find your selected positive listening skill below.

1. When communicating with my partner, I will be aware of when my partner is upset.
2. Even when I am excited or upset, I will focus on my partner and listen.
3. When my partner speaks, I will give my partner my undivided attention.
4. I will pay more attention to what my partner means than to how the message is conveyed.
5. I will ask questions to clarify what I don't understand.
6. I will listen for my partner's main ideas and not get lost in the details.
7. I will listen for something of value in what my partner says even if I don't agree with everything my partner says.
8. I will wait without interrupting until my partner is through, then I will pause, think and respond.
9. I will communicate an understanding of my partner's thoughts and feelings before stating a contrary opinion.
10. I will not change the subject until either my partner is finished, or we agree to change the subject.
11. When my partner criticizes me, I will recognize and admit to anything that is true.
12. In conversation with my partner, I will listen more than I speak.
13. I will observe my partner's facial expressions (without staring) while my partner speaks.
14. I will notice the nonverbal messages given by my partner's body language and physical cues.

Your Plans:

Husband: Identify Your Goal
Wife: Identify Your Goal

Step: 2 – Overcome Obstacles

Life happens. Even with the best intentions, stress or fatigue can trigger old communication "muscle memory". What specific situations make it hardest to stay in your new habit? Identifying these triggers now allows you to pre-program a better response for later. If you revert to an old pattern, don't spiral. Be patient with yourself and your partner. Forgive quickly and pivot back to the new skill as soon as you realize what happened. Knowing why you haven't mastered this skill yet is half the battle. Anticipating the obstacle now prepares you to handle it with grace when it inevitably arises. Foreseeing an obstacle isn't expecting failure; it's building a roadmap for recovery. What potential "roadblocks" might cause you to revert to your old habit instead of your new one?

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Obstacles to Overcome" for your plan.

1. Distraction by my own stress; task-oriented "tunnel vision"; assuming "quietness" is peace.
2. The "Urge to Defend"; high adrenaline making it hard to process info. Fear that my point will be lost.
3. Digital notifications; background noise; a "wandering mind" or mental "to-do" lists.
4. Sensitivity to harsh tones or volume; the urge to "tone-police" my partner.
5. Fear of looking "clueless." Ego's desire to "already know" what they think; rushing to move the talk along.
6. Getting hung up on factual errors; the urge to "fact-check" or interrogate; perfectionist personality.
7. "Winner/Loser" mindset; binary thinking. Fear that agreeing with 1% means I'm "losing".
8. High verbal speed; high-energy mental processing; anxiety about forgetting my point.
9. The rush to "fix" or "correct"; feeling that my own opinion is being silenced.
10. "Kitchen-sinking" (piling on complaints). Using a new topic to deflect from a hard one. Getting bored with the topic.
11. Fragile ego; defensive pride; the "Lash Back" reflex (pointing out their flaws instead).
12. Being a "verbal processor"; "over-explaining" my side; trying to dominate to feel in control.
13. Feeling awkward making eye contact; being too focused on tasks/notes.
14. Misreading cues; ignoring the "vibe" in favor of facts.

Your Plans:

Husband: Overcome Obstacles
Wife: Overcome Obstacles

Step: 3 – Prepare for Action

In this step, you will build the "how-to" blueprint for your new habit. A commitment without a plan is just a wish. To succeed, you need to prepare your environment and your mind for consistent practice. How will you remind yourself to use this skill in the heat of the moment? Is there anything you need to study or have ready? Decide exactly when and where you are most likely to practice. Preparation means removing the friction so that when the moment arises, you don't have to think—you just act.

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Action Preparation" for your plan.

1. Study non-verbal cues (e.g. brow furrowing, pitch changes). Practice "scanning" posture/expression 3x daily to check the emotional climate.
2. Calm my system with 30 seconds of "Box Breathing". Use a physical anchor (touching my ring/sitting on hands) to stay grounded.
3. Eliminate distractions: turn screens off and set phones down immediately. Create a "phone-free" zone.
4. Adopt a "Heart-Translator" mindset. Mentally ask: "If their heart was speaking perfectly, what would it be trying to say?" Focus on the need being expressed.
5. Memorize three "Curiosity Starters" (e.g., "Help me understand..."). Wait for a thought to finish before asking a follow-up.
6. Practice "filtering": ask myself mid-story, "What is the ONE thing they really want me to know or feel?"
7. Hunt for the "1% Truth": find one specific point I can genuinely agree with before moving to my contrary opinion.
8. Press my tongue to the roof of my mouth or sip water while they speak. Take a deep breath and count to 3 in my head before I reply. Practice "STOP": Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed.
9. Use the 'WAIT' acronym (Why Am I Talking?) to check my motives and the 'Echo' technique to reflect my partner's heart and gain confirmation that I accurately understand their view.
10. Commit to "Topic Completion": if the subject shifts, say "Let's finish this first, then we can talk about that".
11. View criticism as "Free Coaching". Practice "Clean Ownership": find the "Core Truth" and admit it without a "but".
12. Set a 10-minute timer for an uninterrupted "sharing block" focused entirely on my partner's heart. Ask 3 follow-up questions before making one "I" statement.
13. Study a "Faces of Emotion" chart. Position chairs to face each other directly. Practice "checking-in" on what I see (e.g., "I notice you look stressed; do you want to talk?").
14. Mirror positive body language (e.g., leaning in) to create rapport. If I notice "closed" cues, ask if they feel safe.

Your Plans:

Husband: Prepare for Action
Wife: Prepare for Action

Step: 4 – Establish Observable Indicators

Now, you will define what success looks like in real-time. First, visualize the win: Picture yourself using this new habit effectively over the next 21 days. Next, identify the evidence: What specific, real-world clues will tell you this habit is sticking? Then, write it in the "Now": Describe these results in the present tense.

(The Science of "Now": Writing in the present tense programs your subconscious to recognize these events as your current reality, making them much more likely to happen.)

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Observable Indicators" for your plan.

1. I accurately name the specific emotion (e.g., frustrated vs. lonely). I notice physical tension (e.g. tight jaw, shoulders) before they speak.
2. My heart rate stays low. My voice remains steady. I accurately summarize their point before I share mine, regardless of disagreement.
3. When my partner is talking, my phone is face down or in another room. My body is squared toward them; no multi-tasking.
4. I respond to the heart-need (e.g., "I see you're overwhelmed") instead of the tone (e.g., "Why are you yelling?; "Don't snap at me").
5. I use phrases like "What did you mean by...?". I don't move to my point until I receive confirmation that their point is understood.
6. I summarize the "big picture" in one sentence. I let minor inaccuracies go; "the feeling is the fact".
7. I find one point to validate (e.g., "I agree the house is cluttered,") even if I disagree it's my fault.
8. There is a clear 2-second gap after they finish. My partner never has to say "Let me finish".

9. I use the "Reflective Bridge": "So, you're saying [X]. That makes sense because [Y]. From my side, I see it as [Z]".
10. The original topic is resolved or "parked" by mutual agreement before moving on.
11. I say, "You're right about that". I name the behavior (e.g., "I was late/ insensitive") and I see how it affected them.
12. My partner does 60-70% of the talking. I am asking more questions than making statements.
13. I notice when eyes soften, brows furrow or jaws tighten. I understand what they are feeling even if they aren't using words.
14. I notice when they cross their arms (defensive), lean away (unsafe), lean in (engaged), fidget or hold their breath.

Your Plans:

Husband: Establish Observable Indicators
Wife: Establish Observable Indicators

Step: 5 – See the Benefits

Visualizing the payoff is one of the most powerful ways to stay motivated when things get difficult. By defining exactly what you stand to gain, you give your brain a reason to prioritize this new habit over old patterns. Fast-forward to the payoff: Imagine it is 21 days from now and you've mastered this skill. What are the benefits?

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Benefits" for your plan.

1. Prevents a small "spark" from becoming a "fire". My partner feels "seen" and valued without having to initiate a hard talk.
2. De-escalates conflict immediately. Maintains the "Covenant" connection even in high-stress moments.
3. Builds deep emotional intimacy. Eliminates frustration of repetition. Signals that my partner is my highest priority.
4. Cuts through surface-level bickering. Fosters compassion by finding the real issue behind a "bad day".
5. Eliminates "mind-reading" errors. Shows my partner I value their perspective. Builds a bridge of understanding.
6. Keeps conversations productive. Partner feels "heard" and supported rather than interrogated or judged.
7. Softens the partner's heart and de-escalates defensiveness. Moves the dynamic from "Opponents" to "Team".
8. My partner feels heard and respected. My responses become "slow-cooked" and thoughtful rather than reactive.
9. Increases receptivity by lowering emotional barriers. Allows my view to be heard rather than resisted.
10. Problems actually get solved. Prevents the "nothing ever changes" fatigue in marriage.
11. Stops arguments in their tracks. Humility is the greatest "fire extinguisher" for an argument.
12. I discover what's actually happening in my partner's world. They feel deeply valued and emotionally safe.
13. Deepens empathy by "reading" the heart through the eyes. Catches hidden sadness or joy.
14. Prevents "forcing" a talk when they are physically shutting down. Creates a sense of physical and emotional alignment.

Your Plans:

Husband: See the Benefits
Wife: See the Benefits

Step 6 – Cost of Inaction

Growth takes effort, but staying stuck has its own price. To stay committed, you must be honest about what happens if you choose not to change. What is the "cost of inaction" for your relationship? Think about the impact on your home, your connection, and your energy. If these old habits continue, what will the "vibe" of your home feel like in six months? How will your

emotional intimacy or friendship suffer if this skill isn't mastered? What is the mental and emotional toll of repeating the same arguments or misunderstandings?

The Reality Check: Inaction isn't free; it costs you the peace and connection you deserve. Write down what you stand to lose if you revert to your old patterns.

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Costs of Inaction" for your plan.

1. Small hurts accumulate into "resentment mountains." Partners stop sharing because it feels like too much work.
2. Leads to "Adrenaline-driven" arguments where hurtful things are said that can't be taken back.
3. Creates "Digital Abandonment," where a partner feels second-place to a screen, leading to emotional distance.
4. The core issue is never solved because every talk derails into a fight about "how" things were said.
5. Assumptions lead to "False Realities" where you are reacting to what you think they said, rather than the truth.
6. Petty bickering over facts kills the emotional flow and makes the partner stop sharing stories with you.
7. Creates a "Wall of Resistance." If you never validate them, they will never feel safe enough to listen to you.
8. Constant interrupting is a form of "verbal bullying" that makes the partner feel their voice doesn't matter.
9. Partners stop listening to you because they don't feel heard by you. It creates a "Dual Monologue."
10. Issues are never buried; they are just "piled up," leading to a feeling of being overwhelmed by the relationship.
11. Excuses (the "But") erase apologies. Without ownership, trust erodes and the same mistakes repeat indefinitely.
12. You become a stranger to your partner's inner world. They eventually find someone else who will listen.
13. You miss the "Silent Cry." You can be technically "listening" while being completely out of touch with their heart.
14. Physical disconnect leads to emotional shutdown. If you ignore their "body's" request for a break, they will stop engaging.

Your Plans:

Husband: Cost of Inaction
Wife: Cost of Inaction

Step: 7 – Praise Your Progress

Building a great marriage is a marathon, not a sprint. To keep your momentum high for the next 21 days, you need a way to celebrate the wins—both the ones your partner notices and the ones you achieve internally.

- Don't wait for perfection. Praise each other (and yourself) for the effort of trying, even if the execution isn't flawless yet. You can actually hack your habits with rewards: Studies show that rewarding a new behavior immediately after it happens makes the habit stick 3x faster.
- Design personal rewards: Discuss what actually feels like a reward to you. Include the "micro-wins" (a favorite coffee) and the "big wins" (uninterrupted time for a hobby).
- Design mutual rewards: Create a plan for "Milestone Rewards" you can enjoy together. This adds an element of fun and teamwork to the practice.
- Look inward: While partner praise is wonderful, don't rely on it exclusively. Acknowledge your own growth and reward yourself; self-motivation is what turns a 21-day practice into a lifetime habit.

Use these ideas to build your own custom reward system. Mix and match small daily "high-fives" with larger milestone celebrations.

Personal Rewards (Solo Refuel)

- \$20 Coffee gift card
- An hour of solo hobby time
- A "Sleep-in Pass" (partner handles kids/chores)
- New outfit or book
- A day of fishing or a round of golf
- A night out with friends
- A professional massage
- A long, relaxing bath
- A favorite snack or special dessert

Group Rewards (Couple Connection)


- Coffee date
- A long walk
- Lunch or dinner out together
- A movie night (theater or home)
- A romantic evening (planned by partner)
- Tickets to a sporting event or concert
- Tech-free evening (phones away after 7pm)
- A good surprise!

Your Plans:

Husband: Praise Your Progress
Wife: Praise Your Progress

Congratulations! Your Listening Action Plan is Complete.

You have successfully mapped out your strategy for better listening. Before you move forward, we encourage you to print your plan using the button below. Keep it in a place where you can review it daily.

 **A Prayer for Our Journey:** *Lord, thank You for the clarity and commitment we've found today. As we move from planning to practice, give us the strength to remain consistent and the grace to support one another. Amen.*



Visualize Your Listening Success

Prepare your mind to execute your new skill with confidence and clarity.

Your mind is incredibly powerful. When you mentally rehearse effective communication – seeing and feeling yourself handle a conversation well – you strengthen those neural pathways, making it more natural to interact positively in real life. This is a safe and powerful way to prepare your mind and get even



*Build your Relational Muscle:
Strengthen your connection by becoming a student of your partner's interests.*

more out of your Action Plan session. In the instruction video below, Marriage Mirror colleague Diantha Cavin will help you set the stage for your mental practice and then guide you through a brief visualization focused on honing this important skill. Let's explore this.



INSTRUCTION VIDEO: Your Visualization Guide to Unlock Deeper Connection
vimeo.com/1177129580

Continue your visualization practice with any of the following options:

Option 1: Quick Guided Visualization: “Practice Makes Progress”

After you've watched the instruction video, you can practice the brief, 5-minute visualization (skipping the instructions) as often as you wish. (vimeo.com/1177129614)

Option 2: Deeper Guided Visualization: Listening – “Your ‘Heart’ of Hearing”

To deepen your practice of effective listening with your partner, try this immersive 19-minute guided visualization led by Diantha Cavin. This visualization will allow you to experience a conversation with your partner in which you employ effective and positive listening habits.



VIDEO: Visualization Exercise: Listening vimeo.com/1177129782
NOTE: Advance to 9:35 if you want to skip the relaxation exercise and go directly to the Listening Visualization Practice.

Option 3: Self-Guided Exercise

Alternatively, you can follow the steps at your own pace, with the printable instructions and visualization steps presented in the first video.

NOTE: The visualization videos and instructions are also available on your member Resources tab.



Affirm Your Partner

Become a "Success Coach" to empower and multiply the positive changes you see.

Great communication doesn't happen in a vacuum—it thrives on encouragement. While you work on your individual goals, you will also act as a “Success Coach” for your partner. To make this easy and fun, we have gathered all your affirmation tools into one place. This is your final step before you execute your plan.

“Caught Ya” Cards



What we focus on, we empower. By shifting your focus from “catching” your partner doing something wrong to acknowledging what they do right, you multiply the peace in your marriage. These cards are designed to move your goals from paper to practice.

- 1) **Prepare Your Cards:** Click the button below to view your "Caught Ya" cards. Print two copies and cut them into strips. Keep the Feedback cards handy (in your wallet or on your desk) so you're always ready to leave a "paper trail" of appreciation.
- 2) **Commit:** Fill out the Commitment Card. Clearly state the specific skill you are working on and hand it to your partner. This "contract" gives them permission to be your Success Coach.
- 3) **Affirm:** When you catch your partner practicing their committed skill, fill out a Feedback Card and give it to them. Be specific about what you saw and how it made you feel. Remember that positive reinforcement is the fastest way to develop a new habit. Your observation helps you both grow!

Heartgrams

If you prefer digital messages, Heartgrams are a delightful way to spark joy and connection with your partner. Just select the image that best fits your words of encouragement and share it via text or email.



Listening Action Deck

These cards are your daily “field guides” for real-time change. They translate the concepts from your Action Plan into simple, actionable prompts. Why use them? Most relationship growth fails because we forget our goals when stress hits. These cards keep your new habits “top of mind” until they become second nature.

Preparation & Assembly: Print a full deck for each of you. Use cardstock if available. There are 4 cards per page. Cut the cards along the borders so they are easy to carry and display.

How to Use Your Deck:

- 1) **The Skill Card (Your Focus):** Take the skill card for your chosen skill. Keep it where you’ll see it—on your desk, your nightstand, or your car’s dashboard. Use the HINT to understand the logic, the HOW to guide your actions, and the RESULT to measure your own success. Let the SOUL quote inspire your mindset.




The Growth Mindset: View feedback as building blocks for a better marriage.

- 2) **The Support Card (Your Partner's Focus):** Take the support card for your partner's chosen skill. It tells you what to look for so you can "catch" your partner practicing their new habit. Use the Affirmation Examples as inspiration for your "Caught Ya" cards, Heartgrams, or daily texts.
- 3) **Full Deck:** While you begin with your chosen skills, you can study the complete "menu" as your communication evolves. You aren't limited to just two cards; you have the whole system at your fingertips.

NOTE: You can access all these Affirmation tools from your member [Resources](#) tab.

You have your tools, your partner has your back, and the plan is ready. Now it's time to move from preparation to transformation.

 **PRAYER:** *Father, we thank You for the progress we are making. Thank You for the moments of connection, the "caught ya" moments of kindness, and the grace we've found in the middle of our struggles. Help us to continue encouraging one another and to never stop tending the garden of our marriage. We trust that as we seek You, You will continue to bless us richly. Amen.*



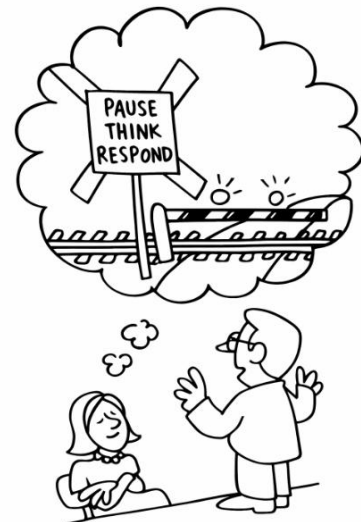
Execute Your Listening Plan

Put your goals into motion and track your progress toward effective listening.

Congratulations on completing the Listening Pillar! You have now taken the essential first step toward transforming your marriage. Remember, effective listening is not a passive activity—it is an active choice you make every day.

As you implement your Action Plan, keep these three essential listening keys at the forefront of every conversation:

- 1) **Reflect First:** Confirm what you heard before you share your own response.
- 2) **Demand Attention:** Pause and go silent until you have your partner's full, undivided attention.
- 3) **Anchor in Grace:** Acknowledge points of agreement and honor your partner's perspective, even if you disagree.



The Connection Rhythm: Wait until they are through – Pause, Think, and then Respond.

Commitment and Reinforcement


By integrating these positive skills, you are building a new, resilient foundation for deeper intimacy and lasting connection, working together toward enhancing the beautiful marriage God intends you to have. Remember to ask God and your partner for help as you apply what you have learned: "Ask and you shall receive."

The tools you have learned are designed to protect your marriage for a lifetime, but the real transformation happens when you put them into practice starting today.

Your Next Steps: Turning Intentions into Lasting Habits

1. **Practice Daily for 3 Weeks:** Commit to a focused, 21-day practice period. Dedicating the next three weeks to your action plan is the key to turning these action steps into permanent habits.
2. **Encourage Each Other with "Caught Ya" Cards:** Transformation thrives on encouragement. Be on the lookout for your spouse's efforts, and use your *Caught Ya cards* to intentionally catch them doing things right. Acknowledging their growth builds immediate momentum.
3. **Retake the Assessments:** In three weeks, log back into the program and retake the assessments. You will be incredibly encouraged to see a tangible, measurable reflection of just how much your relationship has grown!

When you're ready, delve into the next section of the Marriage Mirror and focus on developing your speaking skills. You'll have access to the Marriage Mirror for one full year, allowing you to review your answers and choose another area to improve on.

 **PRAYER:** "Lord, we dedicate this Action Plan and our future conversations to You. We promise to put forth the effort to love each other as You have loved us. We ask for Your guidance at the beginning of every section of our lives together, and we thank You in advance for the breakthroughs and intimacy that are coming. We believe that with Your help, our marriage will truly be rock-solid. Amen."

Your 21-Day Reflection (Optional)

As you spend the next 21 days putting your new listening skills into practice, we would value your insights on the journey you just completed. Your feedback helps us continue to strengthen marriages and refine the Marriage Mirror experience.

Ask attendees to complete the Feedback Form in their Attendee Worksheets or member portal. (NOTE: The portal Feedback Form does not include W1, W2 or W3.)



Enhance your bond and intimacy by communicating with purpose and clarity.

PILLAR TWO: LEARN TO SPEAK EFFECTIVELY



Identify Your Speaking Habits

Start by identifying the speaking habits that hinder and replace them with skills that sustain.

be kind

“How well we communicate is not determined by how well we say things but how well we are understood.” -Andrew Grove, engineer, CEO


The Challenge of Authentic Speaking

The most significant barrier to successful speaking is often the internal goal behind our words. We spend too much time preparing to reply, rather than preparing to truly connect. Effective speaking is built on effective listening, and the foundation of deep listening you developed in Pillar One must now actively guide your speech in Pillar Two, ensuring your words honor and reflect what your partner has shared. Your goal in this pillar to make your words a gift to your spouse, rooted in kindness, clarity, and respect—the core elements of every Kind Word Skill.

CHALLENGE: As you work through the Speaking Skills, commit to two things:

1. Speak to connect and be understood, not to be right.
2. Commit to deliberately practicing one “Kind Word Skill”.

“Perhaps you will forget tomorrow the kind words you say today, but the recipient may cherish them over a lifetime.” -Dale Carnegie

 **PRAYER:** *"Lord, Your Word says that life and death are in the power of the tongue. As we evaluate how we speak to one another, give us eyes to see not just our words, but the heart behind them. Help us to be honest about our tone, our timing, and our intent. May this assessment be a tool for healing, not for hurt. Amen."*



VIDEO: Speaking Skills Assessment

vimeo.com/1180591142

Go Beyond Just Talking

Join founder Dr. Art Robertson and communications expert Dr. Roger Petersen to discover the power of effective speaking. Learn how your tone, pace, and word choice can move your marriage from "chronic contention" to a deeper, more resilient connection.

(Direct attendees to record their scores on their worksheets and/or member portal.)

Speaking – Assessment of Self <i>(How I perceive my own speaking habits)</i> 5 = ALMOST ALWAYS; 4 = USUALLY; 3 = SOMETIMES; 2 = SELDOM; 1 = ALMOST NEVER		NAME:				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	I clearly communicate that I like to talk with my partner.					
2	I compliment my partner often.					
3	I can express disagreement without turning my partner off.					
4	If I criticize my partner, I focus on the issue and avoid any sense of superiority.					
5	I am direct and honest instead of dancing around an issue.					
6	I do not bring up the past when dealing with a present situation.					
7	I ask my partner for feedback to ensure that the message I sent was accurately understood.					
8	When negotiating, I speak in a manner that encourages cooperation.					
9	I avoid trigger words and nonverbal cues that will unnecessarily evoke a negative response.					
10	I think about what I am going to say before I speak.					
11	I remain cordial and respectful of my partner even if my partner disagrees with what I said.					
12	I share freely with my partner, trusting that what I share will be kept confidential.					
Subtotal each column						
Total Score						

Speaking – Assessment of Partner <i>(How I perceive my partner’s speaking habits)</i> 5 = ALMOST ALWAYS; 4 = USUALLY; 3 = SOMETIMES; 2 = SELDOM; 1 = ALMOST NEVER		NAME:				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	It’s clear that my partner likes to communicate with me.					
2	My partner compliments me often.					
3	My partner can express disagreement with me without turning me off.					
4	When my partner criticizes, there is no sense of superiority and the focus is on the issue, not on me.					
5	My partner is direct and honest instead of dancing around an issue.					
6	My partner does not bring up the past when dealing with a present situation.					
7	My partner asks for feedback to ensure that the message sent was accurately understood.					
8	When negotiating, my partner speaks in a manner that encourages cooperation.					
9	My partner avoids trigger words and nonverbal cues that will unnecessarily evoke a negative response.					
10	My partner thinks about what to say before speaking.					
11	My partner remains cordial and respectful of me even if I disagree with what my partner said.					
12	My partner shares freely with me, trusting me to keep it confidential.					
Subtotal each column						
Total Score						



VIDEO: Guide for Assessment Review & Discussion

vimeo.com/1181016423

Unlocking Relational Intelligence with Dr. Bruce Terpstra

With over 40 years of ministry and counseling experience, Dr. Terpstra has trained more than 20,000 people worldwide in relational intelligence. As the founder of the Consentia Group and an expert in soul discipleship, he brings a deep, research-backed perspective on how to heal and strengthen the marital bond.

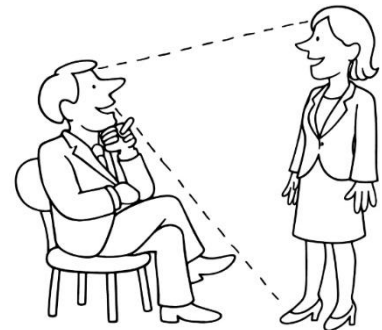


Review & Discuss Results

Review your “Speaking Mirror” to create a path toward deeper intimacy.

“It takes a smart spouse to have the last word and not use it.”

Your Speaking Assessment Review acts as a valuable reflection, mirroring your unique patterns and tendencies. Just as your partner’s perception of you shapes your relationship, the way you both discuss these perceptions significantly impacts the quality of your connection. Effective preparation for these discussions is therefore crucial. The Marriage Mirror gives you the invaluable opportunity to see yourself as your spouse sees you, make changes that lead to profound transformation, and watch what God does for your relationship.



Body Language: Remember that your eyes and physical cues speak louder than your words.

Advance Preparation for Meeting Together

To ensure your assessment review is productive and positive, complete these steps *before* meeting with your partner:

1. **Choose the Time and Place:** Select a time and place where you will be uninterrupted for 45 minutes to review and compare your assessments.
2. **Collect Compliments:** Think of five more compliments to share. (*This article illustrates how the “five-to-one” rule turns criticism from destructive to constructive. See Resources tab: Articles: A Tale of Two Managers.*)
3. **Prepare Your Mindset:** Commit mentally and emotionally to approaching the discussion with humility and curiosity. Your sole purpose is to understand your partner's perspective, not to defend your own.

On-Demand Guidance: During your discussion, you'll have instant access to Discussion Hints and Motivation Tips for every skill. These are designed to help you navigate emotional undercurrents and ground your conversation in timeless truths. Just click the "Hint" or "Tip" icon during your review if you feel stuck or need inspiration.

To see how this works, here is a preview of the guidance available during your review (using Skill #11 as a sample):

SPEAKING SKILL	DISCUSSION HINT	MOTIVATION TIP
I will remain cordial and respectful of my partner even if we disagree over what was said.	Pay attention to your tone of voice, words, and body language. Instead of focusing on who is "right" or "wrong," prioritize finding common ground and expressing your differing views with empathy and understanding. Suggest a break if needed.	"A gentle answer turns away wrath. But a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs. 15:1 NASB). "Respect is a two-way street. If you want to get it, you've got to give it" (R.G. Risch). "The art of disagreeing without being disagreeable" (Mahatma Gandhi).

After you click **Begin Review**, you will enter your Speaking Discussion Covenant. As part of this, you'll be prompted to share the thoughtful compliments you've prepared to set a positive stage for your discussion. Then, click **Begin Now** to see your assessment responses. Use the Discussion Hints and Motivation Tips to spark meaningful dialogue and weave God's wisdom into your marriage. Enjoy your review!

"Don't raise your voice, improve your argument." -Desmond Tutu

Our Speaking Discussion Covenant

Guiding Wisdom:

- *"Kind words are like honey – sweet to the soul and healthy for the body." (Proverbs 16:24)*
- *"A gentle answer will calm a person's anger, but an unkind answer will cause more anger." (Proverbs. 15:1)*
- *"Your speech should always be gracious and sprinkled with insight so that you may know how to respond to every person." (Colossians 4:6)*

Our Commitment: We affirm that this covenant creates a safe, loving space for growth—not judgment. Our partner is our "mirror," revealing blind spots and strengths. We trust God to transform our marriage through this conversation!

Why We Commit

1. Prioritize our relationship.
2. Feel valued, loved, and heard.
3. Ignite trust, romance, and intimacy.
4. Strengthen our bond forever.

Non-Negotiable Ground Rules

1. **Timing:** No meeting if tired, hungry, irritable, or intoxicated.
2. **Mindset:** Zero complaints, criticisms, or disappointment - focus on growth!
3. **Tone:** Use a warm, friendly voice and caring words.
4. **Body Language:** Sit side-by-side (not across), smile, eye contact, open posture.
5. **Mutual Goal:** Understand - not prove we're right.

Our Plan for Discussion

Our plan ensures our discussion brings grace, clarity, and a path to growth:

1. Agree on who begins sharing their assessment answers first.
2. Identify similarities and differences in our perceptions.
3. Celebrate the strengths and successes of how we currently communicate.
4. Define the desired changes we both want to make in our communication.
5. Offer positive ideas and support for helping each other improve our skills.

The Covenant Promise

You are about to step into your Marriage Mirror discussion. This is a time for grace and growth, not for defense or blame. The Covenant Promise secures a productive environment for your discussion. Listen as Dr. Art Robertson shares a brief inspirational message and then guides you through the Covenant ceremony. After the vow is read aloud, kindly respond by saying “I do.”

(Prefer to read? This companion article follows along with the audio message. See Resources tab: Articles – “Marriage as a Divine Covenant.”)



AUDIO: Covenant Ceremony

marriagemirror.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Marriage_Mirror_May_2026.mp3

Step 1: Vow – Share a mutual vow of honor. *(Pause the audio file after the vows, at 4:25.)*

Step 2: Affirmation – Share your prepared compliments. *(When finished, resume the audio.)*

Step 3: Prayer – Join in a prayer of blessing.

Click here for a printable copy of the Discussion Covenant to sign. *(See Resources tab.)*

Ready to Begin: Once you have completed your Vows, Compliments, and Prayer, check the acknowledgment box below to activate the "Begin Now" button.

(Direct attendees to reference their worksheets or member portal to review and discuss their listening assessment results.)



Set Your Speaking Goal

Focus your attention on one specific skill to improve your marital communication.

“Much of our own success rests on the sense of self-esteem, trust, and confidence that we nurture in others.” -Art Robertson, Founder of the Marriage Mirror

Congratulations on taking another look in your Marriage Mirror to observe and improve your reflected image. You’ve received valuable insights into how your partner perceives your communication style. This presents a unique opportunity for positive change. Now, let’s pivot

from analysis to design. Turn insight into action by identifying a specific speaking skill you will improve.

1. Pinpoint Your Growth Goal

View your Scoring Chart

(Direct attendees to view their personalized Scoring Chart in the member portal or reference their assessment worksheets.)

This personalized chart provides a visual comparison of your speaking assessment scores, highlighting your strengths and areas for growth at a glance. Use it to pinpoint specific positive speaking skills you'd like to focus on developing.

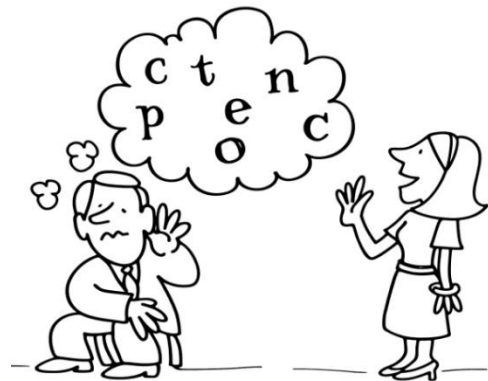
Your Average Score is a crucial snapshot of your current speaking habits. Use the chart below to quickly determine your Speaker Category and understand where your focus needs to be in your Action Plan.

AVERAGE SCORE	SPEAKER CATEGORY	MEANING
4.5 - 5.0	Excellent	You consistently practice positive speaking habits.
3.5 - 4.4	Good	You generally practice positive speaking, but have room for to refine your skills.
2.5 - 3.4	Average	Your speaking skills are inconsistent; you need an active plan to build better habits.
1.0 - 2.4	Needs Improvement	You seldom demonstrate positive speaking skills or habits.

2. Choose a Speaking Skill to work on

Your assessment scores and partner's feedback have pinpointed your areas for growth. Use this data to guide your selection:

- 1) **Narrow the Focus:** Based on your Scoring Chart results and discussion, choose 1 to 3 potential skills you're each willing to work on.
- 2) **Commit to One:** Together, decide on one specific skill for each of you to improve during the next 21 days. This step will be recorded in your action plan.
- 3) **Jot Down Your Skill Number:** Each speaking skill in your results is numbered. Please write down the number of your chosen skill now. You will need this number in the next task to easily find skill-specific examples and measurable steps to help build your Action Plan.



Clear the Fog: Get to the point quickly and avoid getting lost in unnecessary details.

A Note on Growth: While you are choosing one primary skill to focus on for your Action Plan, remember that every positive habit you build strengthens your marriage. Focusing on one goal helps you turn a new skill into a lasting habit without feeling overwhelmed. You will receive additional tools later to help you integrate all the skills.

“He who knows when to speak and when to be silent is a master of communication.”



VIDEO: Designing Your Action Plan

vimeo.com/1180589848

A Plan for Success with Dr. Ken Blanchard

Join world-renowned author and leadership expert Dr. Ken Blanchard to move your relationship from “thinking about change” to actually making it happen. Use this simple, measurable action plan to bridge the gap between where you are and the intimacy you desire.



Design Your Speaking Action Plan

Establish a proven strategy to make your chosen skill a natural part of your life.

“If you just communicate, you can get by. But if you communicate skillfully, you can work miracles.” -Jim Rohn, author, speaker & entrepreneur

Strong communication is the cornerstone of every successful relationship, and none is more crucial than the one you share with your partner. The efficiency of most couples’ communication is only 50%, leading to misunderstandings and missed opportunities for deeper connection. Training will change that. That’s why developing and implementing your 6-Step Action Plan is so important. Deliberately practicing your thoughtfully crafted plan will cultivate skills and strategies to significantly improve your communication effectiveness. This plan works!



Make “Yes” Easy: Organize your “Ask” so it’s simple to follow and easy to say “Yes” to.

1. Schedule Your Planning Session

Choose a time and place to spend **30-45 minutes** together uninterrupted. This is your dedicated time to connect, share your intentions, and create a shared plan that supports the growth and health of your marriage.

2. Your Guided Action Plan


Creating a plan for change shouldn't feel like homework, so we've done the heavy lifting. To make this as easy as possible, each step of your Action Plan is pre-loaded with specific suggestions for every skill. As you walk through the steps, you'll find plenty of examples to choose from. You can simply copy and paste the example given for your chosen skill, strategically pick the ones that resonate with your marriage, or use them as a springboard to quickly jot down your own.

Here is a glimpse of how the examples will support you (using Skill #11 as a sample):

SECTION OF YOUR PLAN	SKILL-SPECIFIC EXAMPLES
Identify Your Goal	I will remain cordial and respectful of my partner even if we disagree over what was said.
Prepare for Action	Agree on a "time-out" signal. Commit to walking away for at least 20 minutes if I can no longer stay respectful. Maintain a "living room" volume and continue to use basic manners (Please/Thank you) even when I am frustrated.
Establish Observable Indicators	My volume remains steady. I no longer use "the cold shoulder" or name-calling. I can state, "I disagree with you, but I still love and respect you."

NEXT STEP: Prepare Your Speaking Action Plan (45 minutes)

A Reminder for the Journey: "Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible." -Dalai Lama

 **Prayer for Growth:** *"Father, thank You for the gift of communication. As we prepare to refine our words and our hearts, give us the grace to be kind and the wisdom to speak with clarity. May our words build up our marriage and reflect Your love. Amen."*

Design Your Action Plan

Imagine a deeper connection, smoother conversations, and a love that grows stronger with every word. Your 6-Step Action Plan will help you cultivate powerful speaking skills to build that reality in your marriage. Remember, change takes time. The more you **practice**, the more you strengthen positive communication and gently release old patterns. To ensure success, start your practice in your mind's eye: **visualize** yourself effectively using your new speaking skill. This mental rehearsal paves the way for real-world success. And don't forget to **celebrate** every effort along the way! Acknowledging and encouraging each other's practice creates a supportive environment and amplifies your success. Enjoy the journey!

Action Plan Steps

(Instruct attendees to complete their Action Plan on their worksheets and/or member portal.)

Step: 1 – Identify Your Goal

Record the skill you have chosen to develop. Describe the desired skill as simply and clearly as possible.

Example: Find your selected positive listening skill below.

1. I will clearly communicate that I like to talk with my partner.
2. I will compliment my partner often.
3. I will express disagreement without turning my partner off.
4. If I criticize my partner, I will focus on the issue and avoid any sense of superiority.
5. I will be direct and honest instead of dancing around an issue.
6. I will not bring up the past when dealing with a present situation.
7. I will ask my partner for feedback to ensure that the message I sent was accurately understood.
8. When negotiating, I will speak in a manner that encourages cooperation.
9. I will avoid trigger words and nonverbal cues that will unnecessarily evoke a negative response.
10. I will think about what I am going to say before I speak.
11. I will remain cordial and respectful of my partner even if we disagree over what was said.
12. I will share freely with my partner, trusting that what I share will be kept confidential.

Your Plans:

Husband: Identify Your Goal
Wife: Identify Your Goal

Step: 2 – Overcome Obstacles

Life happens. Even with the best intentions, stress or fatigue can trigger old communication "muscle memory". What specific situations make it hardest to stay in your new habit? Identifying these triggers now allows you to pre-program a better response for later. If you revert to an old pattern, don't spiral. Be patient with yourself and your partner. Forgive quickly and pivot back to the new skill as soon as you realize what happened. Knowing why you haven't mastered this skill yet is half the battle. Anticipating the obstacle now prepares you to handle it with grace when it inevitably arises. Foreseeing an obstacle isn't expecting failure; it's building a roadmap for recovery. What potential "roadblocks" might cause you to revert to your old habit instead of your new one?

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Obstacles to Overcome" for your plan.

1. Assuming they already know; being "peopled out" or exhausted from work.
2. Noticing the negative more than the positive; "taking them for granted"; feeling "cheezy;" forgetting to express my appreciation.
3. The "urgent need" to be right; the "Blame Trap": "You always/never..." or "You make me...."; the habit of leading with a harsh, frustrated tone.
4. Self-righteousness; the urge to "parent," teach or lecture my partner; believing my way is the only "right" way; feeling superior when my partner makes mistakes.
5. Fear of conflict; people-pleasing; the belief that if they really loved me, I wouldn't have to ask; using "hints" to avoid the vulnerability of a direct request.
6. Needing "ammo" to win a current fight; the "Scorekeeper" mentality, feeling that a past mistake was never fully resolved or "paid for."
7. Assuming that because it makes sense to me, it makes sense to them. Being too rushed to double-check. Fearing that asking for a recap will sound patronizing.

8. A controlling nature; a "my way or the highway" mentality; using authoritative words like "You need to" instead of collaborative language like "How about...?"
9. Using sarcasm as a defense mechanism; using humor to "bite" or deflect; the momentary "satisfaction" of a clever jab; believing a "Zinger" will best make my point.
10. Emotional "Flooding" (where feelings overwhelm logic); impulsive speech; the habit of "thinking out loud" without a filter.
11. "Righteous Anger"; the belief that my partner doesn't "deserve" my respect. Viewing my spouse as an "enemy" to be defeated rather than a friend I disagree with.
12. Fear of judgment, mockery. Fear that my private struggles will be shared with others. The habit of keeping a separate inner life to avoid potential conflict.

Your Plans:

Husband: Overcome Obstacles
Wife: Overcome Obstacles

Step: 3 – Prepare for Action

In this step, you will build the "how-to" blueprint for your new habit. A commitment without a plan is just a wish. To succeed, you need to prepare your environment and your mind for consistent practice. How will you remind yourself to use this skill in the heat of the moment? Is there anything you need to study or have ready? Decide exactly when and where you are most likely to practice. Preparation means removing the friction so that when the moment arises, you don't have to think—you just act.

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Action Preparation" for your plan.

1. Invite connection: "I've been looking forward to catching up with you." Initiate check-ins when there is no "problem" to solve. Ask follow-up questions. Set a daily "Connect with [Partner]" alarm.
2. Keep a "Gratitude Log." Share one compliment via text during the work day, and one in person before bed. Commit to the "60-second Rule": say the nice thought out loud within one minute of thinking it.
3. Script the XYZ Formula: "When X happened, I felt Y, and I need Z." Lead with a positive. Commit to "I" statements (my experience) and strictly avoid starting with "You" (blame). Aim to solve a problem, not win an argument.
4. Block your "Me vs. You" impulse by mentally moving to the same side of the table as your spouse, facing the issue together. Change "Why don't YOU...?" (triggers defensiveness) to "How can WE...?" (invites a solution).
5. Write down my main point before the talk so I don't get lost in words. State my specific "Ask" in the first two sentences. Eliminate passive-aggressive hints, "tests," or hoping they will "just figure it out." Say: "I have a specific need I'd like to share."
6. Focus exclusively on the "Current Receipt." Tell myself: "That memory is for a different talk; today we stay focused on fixing the current issue." Commit to solving today's problem rather than re-litigating yesterday's.
7. Pause for a "recap" after an important request. Ask: "To make sure I was clear, what did you hear me ask for?" Inquire about the emotional impact by asking: "Did that land okay, or did I say it too harshly?"
8. Frame requests as invitations using phrases like: "How would you feel about [X]?" Brainstorm two solutions and then ask for my partner's third option. Seek "Buy-in" and partnership rather than demanding compliance or obedience.
9. Identify my partner's "Top 3 Triggers" and ban them from my vocabulary entirely. Take a 5-second breath and then plainly state my underlying emotion (e.g., "I'm feeling frustrated") instead of making a "clever" sarcastic comment.
10. Apply the T.H.I.N.K. method: Is it True, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary, Kind? Take a mandatory 5-second pause to let my "logical brain" catch up to my "emotional brain."
11. Agree on a "time-out" signal. Commit to taking a break for at least 20 minutes if I can no longer stay respectful. Maintain a "living room" volume and continue to use basic manners (Please/Thank you) even when I am frustrated.
12. Commit to being an "open book." Start with "small vulnerabilities" to incrementally rebuild transparency and trust. Clearly state your need for sensitivity and confidentiality: "I need to know this is safe with you—both inside and outside of this house."

Your Plans:

Husband: Prepare for Action
Wife: Prepare for Action

Step: 4 – Establish Observable Indicators

Now, you will define what success looks like in real-time. First, visualize the win: Picture yourself using this new habit effectively over the next 21 days. Next, identify the evidence: What specific, real-world clues will tell you this habit is sticking? Then, write it in the “Now”: Describe these results in the present tense.

(The Science of “Now”: Writing in the present tense programs your subconscious to recognize these events as your current reality, making them much more likely to happen.)

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Observable Indicators" for your plan.

1. My partner looks more relaxed when we talk. Conversations feel less like "business" and more like "connection." There is a visible warmth between us.
2. I notice the small things. I give at least one specific, character-based compliment daily (e.g., "I love how patient you were today").
3. We sustain the conversation for 10+ minutes without anger or “walls” (withdrawal/ stonewalling). We preserve the relationship “Covenant” even during conflict.
4. I talk about a specific "behavior" rather than their "character." My partner remains engaged in problem-solving rather than withdrawing in shame.
5. I am clear and kind, not "dancing around" the point. The conversation is focused and shorter because the goal is clear.
6. We stay on one topic for the duration of the talk. I don't mention mistakes from weeks or months ago. I am actively looking for a solution for today.
7. I value my partner’s perception of my message as much as the message itself. We both leave the conversation with the same “mental map” of what was agreed upon.
8. I use "We/Our" language instead of "I/You." I ask: "What are your thoughts on how we can fix this together?" I notice my partner offering ideas rather than just nodding.
9. There is a total absence of sarcasm, eye-rolling, or heavy sighing during our talks. My tone stays warm and respectful even when the topic is difficult or I feel slighted.
10. My words are intentional and measured. I no longer "shoot from the hip" or find myself constantly apologizing for a tone or statement made in the heat of the moment.
11. My volume remains steady. I no longer use “the cold shoulder” or name-calling. I can state, “I disagree with you, but I still love and respect you.”
12. I share my secrets, fears, and dreams without filtering or "rehearsing." I no longer feel the need to "edit" my heart before speaking. I am the first to tell my partner my news, good or bad.

Your Plans:

Husband: Establish Observable Indicators
Wife: Establish Observable Indicators

Step: 5 – See the Benefits

Visualizing the payoff is one of the most powerful ways to stay motivated when things get difficult. By defining exactly what you stand to gain, you give your brain a reason to prioritize this new habit over old patterns. Fast-forward to the payoff: Imagine it is 21 days from now and you’ve mastered this skill. What are the benefits?

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Benefits" for your plan.

1. Makes them feel wanted. Reduces anxiety of being a "burden." Builds a foundation of friendship, not just logistics.
2. Boosts confidence. Builds a culture of appreciation. Creates emotional grace where small mistakes matter less because the bank account is full.
3. Problems are solved in the receptive "Safe Zone" rather than "Fight-or-Flight." We move from Opponents to Partners. Keeps the door open for resolution and connection.
4. Preserves partner's dignity. Fosters a team atmosphere where they actually want to help and cooperate because they feel respected, not judged.
5. No more "mind-reading" games or resentment from unmet, unstated needs. Requests get answered because they are finally understood. More emotional energy available for both.
6. Allows for true "clean slates," making forgiveness a reality rather than just a word. Makes it safe for my partner to admit a mistake today without fear of a "history lesson."
7. Prevents the "I thought you meant..." arguments three days later. Builds a culture of "collaborative clarity." Catches misunderstandings before they have a chance to turn into fights.
8. My partner feels like a co-creator of our life. They become motivated by love and shared vision rather than pressured by duty. It builds a sustainable "Win-Win" culture.
9. Creates "emotional safety," allowing my partner to be vulnerable without fear of being mocked or "stung." Breaks a cycle of retaliation where one Zinger leads to another.
10. My words become a "blessing" instead of a "weapon." I build a reputation as a safe, wise, and steady partner whom my spouse can trust even during a disagreement.
11. Protects the long-term dignity of the marriage. Prevents "scar tissue" caused by yelling. Ensures the friendship stays intact even when the agreement is missing.
12. Leads to the highest form of intimacy: being fully known and fully loved. Creates a "shared inner world" that belongs only to the two of us, making the marriage a true refuge.

Your Plans:

Husband: See the Benefits
Wife: See the Benefits

Step 6 – Cost of Inaction

Growth takes effort, but staying stuck has its own price. To stay committed, you must be honest about what happens if you choose not to change. What is the "cost of inaction" for your relationship? Think about the impact on your home, your connection, and your energy. If these old habits continue, what will the "vibe" of your home feel like in six months? How will your emotional intimacy or friendship suffer if this skill isn't mastered? What is the mental and emotional toll of repeating the same arguments or misunderstandings?

The Reality Check: Inaction isn't free; it costs you the peace and connection you deserve. Write down what you stand to lose if you revert to your old patterns.

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Costs of Inaction" for your plan.

1. Partner feels like an "obligation" or a chore, leading them to withdraw and stop sharing their inner life.
2. A "Criticism Culture" grows. Without regular praise, the partner feels unappreciated and eventually resentful.
3. Harsh startups are the #1 predictor of divorce; they trigger defensiveness.
4. My partner may stop listening entirely to protect their heart from the "sting" of my accusations. My partner feels belittled and "less than," leading to power struggles or a "rebellious" withdrawal where they stop caring about my needs altogether.
5. Passive-aggression creates a "toxic fog" where the partner is always on edge. It destroys trust because they feel "set up to fail" a test they didn't know they were taking.
6. The partner feels they can never "pay off the debt" of the past. If they feel they are already "bankrupt" in my eyes, they will stop trying to improve or invest in the relationship today.
7. Small miscommunications compound into massive frustrations. Failed tasks from misunderstandings are misinterpreted as "not caring" and lead to resentment.
8. Demands and "musts" create immediate internal resistance. Even if the partner complies, they do so with a growing heart of bitterness and a loss of intimacy.
9. "Zingers" act like emotional acid; they eat away at the foundation of the marriage until there is nothing left to hold onto.
10. Words said in anger can be forgiven, but they can never be un-heard. They create "memory scars" that stay with my partner forever, regardless of how many times I apologize.
11. When respect is lost, the friendship dies. Once our friendship dies, the marriage loses its soul and becomes a cold, distant "business arrangement" or a "roommate" situation.
12. Without confidentiality, the relationship feels exposed. Without transparency, it feels distant and alienated. Eventually, 2 strangers live under one roof, looking for safety elsewhere.

Your Plans:

Husband: Cost of Inaction
Wife: Cost of Inaction

Step: 7 – Praise Your Progress

Building a great marriage is a marathon, not a sprint. To keep your momentum high for the next 21 days, you need a way to celebrate the wins—both the ones your partner notices and the ones you achieve internally.

- Don't wait for perfection. Praise each other (and yourself) for the effort of trying, even if the execution isn't flawless yet. You can actually hack your habits with rewards: Studies show that rewarding a new behavior immediately after it happens makes the habit stick 3x faster.
- Design personal rewards: Discuss what actually feels like a reward to you. Include the "micro-wins" (a favorite coffee) and the "big wins" (uninterrupted time for a hobby).
- Design mutual rewards: Create a plan for "Milestone Rewards" you can enjoy together. This adds an element of fun and teamwork to the practice.
- Look inward: While partner praise is wonderful, don't rely on it exclusively. Acknowledge your own growth and reward yourself; self-motivation is what turns a 21-day practice into a lifetime habit.

Use these ideas to build your own custom reward system. Mix and match small daily "high-fives" with larger milestone celebrations.

Personal Rewards (Solo Refuel)

- \$20 Coffee gift card
- An hour of solo hobby time
- A "Sleep-in Pass" (partner handles kids/chores)
- New outfit or book
- A day of fishing or a round of golf
- A night out with friends
- A professional massage
- A long, relaxing bath
- A favorite snack or special dessert

Group Rewards (Couple Connection)


- Coffee date
- A long walk
- Lunch or dinner out together
- A movie night (theater or home)
- A romantic evening (planned by partner)
- Tickets to a sporting event or concert
- Tech-free evening (phones away after 7pm)
- A good surprise!

Your Plans:

Husband: Praise Your Progress
Wife: Praise Your Progress

Congratulations! Your Speaking Action Plan is Complete.

You have successfully mapped out your strategy for better communication. Before you move forward, we encourage you to print your plan using the button below. Keep it in a place where you can review it daily.

 **A Prayer for Our Journey:** *Lord, thank You for the clarity and commitment we've found today. As we move from planning to practice, give us the strength to remain consistent and the grace to support one another. Amen.*



Visualize Your Speaking Success

Prepare your mind to execute your new skill with confidence and clarity.

Visualization helps you “pre-play” your new skills, making them feel natural and familiar before you ever use them in a real conversation. By mentally rehearsing effective speaking – seeing and feeling yourself articulate clearly and authentically – you’re training your brain to speak your truth with greater confidence. Let’s explore this.

Option 1: Quick Guided Visualization: “Practice Makes Progress”

This brief, 5-minute visualization will help you quickly align your mind for harmonious communication with your partner. Before you dive in, map out the conversation you wish to visualize:

1. When and where will your uninterrupted conversation take place?
2. What will your partner look and sound like?
3. Which specific speaking skill will you be focusing on?
4. How do you want to feel during this interaction?



VIDEO: A Quick Visualization for Connection

vimeo.com/1177129614

Option 2: Deeper Guided Visualization: Speaking – “Your Voice of Harmony”

To deepen your practice of effective speaking with your partner, try this immersive 19-minute guided visualization led by Diantha Cavin. This visualization will allow you to experience a conversation with your partner in which you employ effective and positive speaking habits.



VIDEO: Visualization Exercise: Speaking

vimeo.com/1177129705

NOTE: Advance to 7:15 if you want to skip the relaxation exercise and go directly to the Speaking Visualization Practice.

Option 3: Self-Guided Exercise

Alternatively, you can follow the steps at your own pace, with the printable visualization guide.

NOTE: The visualization videos and guide are also available on your member Resources tab.



Affirm Your Partner

Become a "Success Coach" to empower and multiply the positive changes you see.



"Caught Ya" Cards



Heartgrams



Speaking Action Deck

To follow along in the Facilitator's Guide, see "Affirm Your Partner" in the Listening Pillar.



Execute Your Speaking Plan

Put your goals into motion and track your progress toward effective speaking.

Congratulations on your joint effort to cultivate the beautiful marriage God desires for you. Remember, speaking is the expression of your love, and the goal is to make your words like "honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body."

As you practice your new skill, keep these two keys in mind:

- 1) **Choose Grace Over Anger:** If a conversation involves disagreement, try talking about your points of agreement first before approaching your difference of opinion. Always be willing to compromise and be considerate of your partner's point of view.
- 2) **Build Up, Don't Tear Down:** Consciously choose language that is "gracious and sprinkled with insight" so that your speech is only "beneficial for building others up." A "gentle answer will calm a person's anger," while an unkind answer will only cause more anger.

Commitment and Reinforcement

You've done the hardest part—now go put your gracious words into action! Your Action Plan serves as your roadmap, guiding you to practice your chosen speaking skill and enjoy the rewarding journey.


Remember to seek guidance from both God and your partner as you implement what you have learned. "Ask and you shall receive."

Be mindful of your partner's efforts to improve their communication and express your gratitude. This positive reinforcement will significantly contribute to enhanced communication, deeper commitment, greater fulfillment, and profound intimacy.

Next Steps

We recommend practicing your new speaking skill for 21 days before moving on to the Environment section. You may retake the Speaking section at any time – You'll be inspired by your progress. To re-open it, simply click on the Speaking tab and select "Retake". You can then move between active sections by clicking on their respective tabs.

When you're ready, delve into the next section of the Marriage Mirror and focus on developing your environment skills. You have a full year to utilize the Marriage Mirror. It is our prayer that God abundantly blesses you as you strive to fulfill His will by becoming a more effective communicator within your marriage.

 **PRAYER:** *Father, we recognize that our words have the power to build up or to tear down, and today we choose to be builders. As we step into the next few weeks of practice, set a guard over our mouths and keep watch over the door of our lips. When we are tempted to use words that hurt, remind us of the commitment we've made here. Give us the wisdom to choose words that reflect Your love, and the humility to apologize quickly when we fail. May the "Speaking Mirror" we've created today lead us to a marriage where we both feel heard, valued, and safe. We commit our tongues and our hearts to You. Amen.*



Create a supportive setting that fosters positive and satisfying communication.

PILLAR THREE: LEARN TO CHOOSE EFFECTIVE ENVIRONMENTS



Identify Your Environment Habits

Start by identifying the environments that encumber communication and replace them with environments that enhance communication.



“A positive attitude emitting mutual respect is the first step to providing an environment for mutual satisfaction in your relationship.” -Art Robertson, Founder of the Marriage Mirror

The Right Environment: A Checklist for Success

The Environment Pillar ensures that your setting supports the successful use of your Listening and Speaking skills. The environment is the non-negotiable foundation for effective communication. The most skilled speaker and listener will fail if the physical or emotional environment is toxic. Review this simple checklist before every serious conversation:




Drop the Digital Third Wheel: Put devices out of sight so your connection remains one-on-one.

Is the Environment Right?

- We are **not** tired, hungry, or intoxicated.
- We have eliminated all external distractions (devices, TV, kids).
- We are sitting face-to-face in a comfortable, private location.
- We have already agreed on the Topic and the Time Limit for the discussion.

“Setting the stage for a hard discussion is 90% of a positive outcome.”



 **PRAYER:** *"Lord, You are the Prince of Peace, and we desire for our marriage to be a sanctuary of that peace. As we look at the environment we've created together, help us identify the 'weeds' that are choking out our joy—whether it's busyness, technology, or unresolved tension. Show us how to make our relationship a priority in the middle of a loud world. Amen."*


VIDEO: Environment Skills Assessment
vimeo.com/1180591359
Beyond the Words: Creating the Right Space to Connect

Join Dr. Art Robertson and internationally recognized psychologist Dr. Samuel Barkat to discover how physical, emotional, and spiritual comfort levels impact your ability to share and hear one another. Learn to cut through the noise of a busy world and create a “wholesome environment” where your relationship can truly flourish.

(Direct attendees to record their scores on their worksheets and/or member portal.)

Environment – Assessment of Self <i>(How I perceive my own environment habits)</i> 5 = ALMOST ALWAYS; 4 = USUALLY; 3 = SOMETIMES; 2 = SELDOM; 1 = ALMOST NEVER		NAME:				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	I do not allow my schedule to negatively affect my ability to communicate with my partner.					
2	I have a regular time together with my partner for talking.					
3	For important discussions, I find a time and place where we will not be interrupted.					
4	I consider how internal and external factors can influence the emotion in our conversation.					
5	When the environment is not suitable, I suggest we change the time and/or place to continue our conversation.					
6	I am aware of significant dates in my partner’s life, especially those which are felt emotionally.					
7	I recognize and remove sounds or images that would be distracting.					
8	I know which of my clothes and general appearance my partner most appreciates.					
9	I know the best environment in which to discuss important matters with my partner.					
10	I am aware of the time of day when my partner is most able to have a meaningful conversation.					
11	I am aware of my partner’s favorite kinds of places, both indoors and outdoors.					
12	I know what kind of lighting my partner prefers for various activities.					
Subtotal each column						
Total Score						

Environment – Assessment of Partner <i>(How I perceive my partner's environment habits)</i> 5 = ALMOST ALWAYS; 4 = USUALLY; 3 = SOMETIMES; 2 = SELDOM; 1 = ALMOST NEVER		NAME:				
		5	4	3	2	1
1	My partner does not allow their schedule to negatively affect their ability to communicate with me.					
2	My partner has a regular time together with me for talking.					
3	For important discussions, my partner finds a time and place where we will not be interrupted.					
4	My partner considers how internal and external factors can influence the emotion in our conversation.					
5	When the environment is not suitable, my partner suggests we change the time and/or place to continue our conversation.					
6	My partner is aware of significant dates in my life, especially those which are felt emotionally.					
7	My partner recognizes and removes sounds or images that would be distracting.					
8	My partner knows which clothes and general appearance I most appreciate.					
9	My partner knows the best environment in which to discuss important matters with me.					
10	My partner is aware of the time of day when I am most able to have a meaningful conversation.					
11	My partner is aware of my favorite kinds of places, both indoors and outdoors.					
12	My partner knows what kind of lighting I prefer for various activities.					
Subtotal each column						
Total Score						

**VIDEO: Guide for Assessment Review & Discussion**vimeo.com/1181016423**Unlocking Relational Intelligence with Dr. Bruce Terpstra**

With over 40 years of ministry and counseling experience, Dr. Terpstra has trained more than 20,000 people worldwide in relational intelligence. As the founder of the Consentia Group and an expert in soul discipleship, he brings a deep, research-backed perspective on how to heal and strengthen the marital bond.



Review & Discuss Results

Review your “Environment Mirror” to create a path toward deeper intimacy.

“Our surroundings influence us far more than we are willing to admit.” -Paul Erdos

Your Environment Assessment Review reveals how your surroundings impact your ability to connect with your partner emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Your understanding of each other’s perspectives will create a shared understanding of what fosters open and honest dialogue so you can intentionally create a more comfortable and conducive space for connection.

Advance Preparation for Meeting Together

To ensure your assessment review is productive and positive, complete these steps *before* meeting with your partner:

1. **Choose the Time and Place:** Select a time and place where you will be uninterrupted for 45 minutes to review and compare your assessments.
2. **Collect Compliments:** Think of five more compliments to share. Remember: *“Kind words are like honey – sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.” (Proverbs 16:24)*
3. **Prepare Your Mindset:** Commit mentally and emotionally to approaching the discussion with humility and curiosity. Your sole purpose is to understand your partner’s perspective, not to defend your own.

On-Demand Guidance: During your discussion, you’ll have instant access to Discussion Hints and Motivation Tips for every skill. These are designed to help you navigate emotional undercurrents and ground your conversation in timeless truths. Just click the "Hint" or "Tip" icon during your review if you feel stuck or need inspiration.

To see how this works, here is a preview of the guidance available during your review (using Skill #7 as a sample).

ENVIRONMENT SKILL	DISCUSSION HINT	MOTIVATION TIP
I will consider how internal and external factors influence our emotions in conversation and adjust accordingly.	Feelings are shaped by what’s going on inside each of you (stress, tiredness, past) and what’s happening around you (chaos, sights, sounds). Awareness and understanding of these influences allow you to respond with more empathy and less reactivity.	“External events can provide the trigger for our emotions, but our beliefs about those events determine the intensity and duration of the emotional response” (Albert Ellis). “When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion” (Dale Carnegie).

After you click **Begin Review**, you will enter your Environment Discussion Covenant. As part of this, you’ll be prompted to share the thoughtful compliments you’ve prepared to set a positive stage for your discussion. Then, click **Begin Now** to see your responses. Use the Discussion Hints and Motivation Tips to spark meaningful dialogue and weave God’s wisdom into your marriage. Enjoy your review!

Read this article to discover how marriage communication challenges can be addressed by honestly exploring “What’s it like to be married to me?”.

(See Resources tab: Articles: Effective Communication Improves Marriage and Family Life.)

Our Environment Discussion Covenant

Guiding Wisdom:

- “The right word spoken at the right time is as beautiful as gold apples in a silver bowl.” (Proverbs 25:11)
- “Let no harmful word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for building others up according to the need, so that it gives grace to those who hear it.” (Ephesians 4:29)
- “Life is short, and you love your wife, so enjoy being with her.” (Ecclesiastes 9:9)

Our Commitment: We affirm that this covenant creates a safe, loving space for growth—no judgment. Our partner is our "mirror," revealing blind spots and strengths. We trust God to transform our marriage through this conversation!

Why We Commit

1. Prioritize our relationship.
2. Feel valued, loved, and heard.
3. Ignite trust, romance, and intimacy.
4. Strengthen our bond forever.

Non-Negotiable Ground Rules

1. **Timing:** No meeting if tired, hungry, irritable, or intoxicated.
2. **Mindset:** Zero complaints, criticisms, or disappointment - focus on growth!
3. **Tone:** Use a warm, friendly voice and caring words.
4. **Body Language:** Sit side-by-side (not across), smile, eye contact, open posture.
5. **Mutual Goal:** Understand - not prove we're right.

Our Plan for Discussion

Our plan ensures our discussion brings grace, clarity, and a path to growth:

1. Agree on who begins sharing their assessment answers first.
2. Identify similarities and differences in our perceptions.
3. Celebrate the strengths and successes of how we currently communicate.
4. Define the desired changes we both want to make in our communication.
5. Offer positive ideas and support for helping each other improve our skills.

The Covenant Promise

You are about to step into your Marriage Mirror discussion. This is a time for grace and growth, not for defense or blame. The Covenant Promise secures a productive environment for your discussion. Listen as Dr. Art Robertson shares a brief inspirational message and then guides you through the Covenant ceremony. After the vow is read aloud, kindly respond by saying “I do.”

(Prefer to read? This companion article follows along with the audio message. [See Resources tab: Articles – “Marriage as a Divine Covenant.”](#))



AUDIO: Covenant Ceremony

marriagemirror.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Marriage_Mirror_May_2026.mp3

Step 1: Vow – Share a mutual vow of honor. *(Pause the audio file after the vows, at 4:25.)*

Step 2: Affirmation – Share your prepared compliments. *(When finished, resume the audio.)*

Step 3: Prayer – Join in a prayer of blessing.

Click here for a printable copy of the Discussion Covenant to sign. [\(See Resources tab.\)](#)

Ready to Begin: Once you have completed your Vows, Compliments, and Prayer, check the acknowledgment box below to activate the "Begin Now" button.

(Direct attendees to reference their worksheets or member portal to review and discuss their listening assessment results.)



Set Your Environment Goal

Focus your attention on one specific skill to improve your marital communication.

“The little things? The little moments? They aren’t little.” -Jon Kabat-Zinn

Congratulations on successfully completing another section of your Marriage Mirror journey. Your assessment results and partner feedback have given you valuable insights into the environmental factors that influence your connection. Now let’s pivot from reflection to design as you prepare to create your personalized Environment Action Plan. To begin, choose a positive environmental

skill to focus on that will ensure your dedicated time together is more consistently comfortable, conducive, and rooted in grace.

1. Pinpoint Your Growth Goal

View your Scoring Chart

(Direct attendees to view their personalized Scoring Chart in the member portal or reference their assessment worksheets.)

This personalized chart provides a visual comparison of your environment assessment scores, highlighting your strengths and areas for growth at a glance. Use it to pinpoint specific positive environment skills you'd like to focus on developing.

Your Average Score is a crucial snapshot of your current environment setting habits. Use the chart below to quickly determine your Environment Setter Category and understand where your focus needs to be in your Action Plan.

AVERAGE SCORE	ENVIRONMENT SETTER CATEGORY	MEANING
4.5 - 5.0	Excellent	You consistently practice positive environment-setting habits.
3.5 - 4.4	Good	You generally set positive environments, but have room for to refine your skills.
2.5 - 3.4	Average	Your environment-setting skills are inconsistent; you need an active plan to build better habits.
1.0 - 2.4	Needs Improvement	You seldom demonstrate positive environment-setting skills or habits.

2. Choose an Environment Skill to work on

Your assessment scores and partner's feedback have pinpointed your areas for growth. Use this data to guide your selection:

1. **Narrow the Focus:** Based on your Scoring Chart results and discussion, choose 1 to 3 potential skills you're each willing to work on.
2. **Commit to One:** Together, decide on one specific skill for each of you to improve during the next 21 days. This step will be recorded in your action plan.
3. **Jot Down Your Skill Number:** Each speaking skill in your results is numbered. Please write down the number of your chosen skill now. You will need this number in the next task to easily find skill-specific examples and measurable steps to help build your Action Plan.

A Note on Growth: While you are choosing one primary skill to focus on for your Action Plan, remember that every positive habit you build strengthens your marriage. Focusing on one goal helps you turn a new skill into a lasting habit without feeling overwhelmed. You will receive additional tools later to help you integrate all the skills.

Motivation Tip: Research shows that even simple conversations can have a significant impact on your cardiovascular system, affecting your overall health and well-being. [LEARN MORE: See Resources tab: Articles: Effective Communication Is Good For Your Health](#)



VIDEO: Designing Your Action Plan

vimeo.com/1180589848

A Plan for Success with Dr. Ken Blanchard

Join world-renowned author and leadership expert Dr. Ken Blanchard to move your relationship from “thinking about change” to actually making it happen. Use this simple, measurable action plan to bridge the gap between where you are and the intimacy you desire.



Design Your Environment Action Plan

Establish a proven strategy to make your chosen skill a natural part of your life.

“Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light.” -J.K. Rowling

Congratulations on completing your Environment Assessment Review! You’ve identified the "climate" of your relationship; now it’s time to turn those insights into lasting positive change. By creating a specific action plan, you are choosing to "turn on the light" in your marriage.

1. Schedule Your Planning Session

Set aside **45 minutes** to develop this plan. This session will guide you step-by-step toward your goals and bring greater joy and connection to your daily life together.

2. Your Guided Action Plan

Creating a plan for change shouldn't feel like homework, so we've done the heavy lifting. To make this as easy as possible, each step of your Action Plan is pre-loaded with specific suggestions for every skill. As you walk through the steps, you'll find plenty of examples to choose from. You can simply copy and paste the example given for your chosen skill, strategically pick the ones that resonate with your marriage, or use them as a springboard to quickly jot down your own.




Set the Stage for Success: Eliminate distractions to create a clear path for connection.

Here is a glimpse of how the examples will support you (using Skill #7 as a sample):

SECTION OF YOUR PLAN	SKILL-SPECIFIC EXAMPLES
Identify Your Goal	I will recognize and remove sounds or images that would be distracting.
Prepare for Action	Initiate a “clear the clutter” session so we can relax in a clean space. Turn off the TV. Put phones in a basket, drawer, or another room. Square my shoulders to signal total focus. Ensure background music is quiet and soothing, not distracting.
Establish Observable Indicators	My partner doesn’t have to compete with a device or a chore for my attention. Eye contact is consistent. I am not “scanning” the room for something else to do.

NEXT STEP: Prepare Your Environment Action Plan (45 minutes)

*Hang in there: Longitudinal studies reveal that **two out of three** unhappily married adults who stayed together **became happily married within five years**. Discover the surprising benefits of sticking it out in this article. ([See Resources tab: Articles: The Abundant Benefits of Marriage Over and Above Just Living Together.](#))*

 **Prayer for Our Home:** "Father, we thank You for the home and the life we share. As we prepare this plan, help us to be intentional about the atmosphere we create for one another. Grant us the wisdom to turn on the light in dark moments and the grace to build a sanctuary of peace, joy, and safety. Amen."

Design Your Action Plan

Having developed and implemented your Listening and Speaking Action Plans, you’re now ready to focus on creating the best environment for effective communication. Not every time and place is suitable for every conversation. By focusing on this “environmental” aspect, you’re learning to choose the ideal context for important discussions. Many people overlook this crucial step, often with negative consequences. Thoughtfully considering the time and place *before* communicating can significantly improve your marriage.

As you prepare to apply your new knowledge for the third time, expect positive results. Both social science and scripture support the idea that effective communication is key to marital success. By focusing on these skills, you’re addressing the 20% of actions that contribute to 80% of your marital happiness. You are learning and building skills that foster deep trust and teamwork.

As a reminder: It takes 21 days of daily practice to form a new habit. For best results, clearly define the desired behavior. Visualize, hear, and feel yourself performing it. Acknowledge and encourage each other’s efforts. Your mutual support will solidify your progress. Let’s get started!

Action Plan Steps

(Instruct attendees to complete their Action Plan on their worksheets and/or member portal.)

Step: 1 – Identify Your Goal

Record the skill you have chosen to develop. Describe the desired skill as simply and clearly as possible.

Example: Find your selected positive listening skill below.

1. I will not allow my schedule to negatively affect my ability to communicate with my partner.
2. I will encourage and work with my partner to have a regular time together for talking.
3. For important discussions, I will work with my partner to find a time and place free from interruptions.
4. I will consider how internal and external factors influence our emotions in conversation and adjust accordingly.
5. When the environment is unsuitable, I will suggest a better time and/or place to continue our conversation.
6. I will recognize and honor significant dates in my partner's life, especially those which are felt emotionally.
7. I will recognize and remove sounds or images that would be distracting.
8. I will observe and appropriately choose the clothes and general appearance my partner most appreciates.
9. I will learn and choose the best environment in which to discuss important matters with my partner.
10. I will learn and choose the time of day when my partner is most able to have a meaningful conversation.
11. I will learn and choose my partner's favorite kinds of places for conversation, both indoors and outdoors.
12. I will learn and choose the kind of lighting my partner prefers for various activities.

Your Plans:

Husband: Identify Your Goal
Wife: Identify Your Goal

Step: 2 – Overcome Obstacles

Life happens. Even with the best intentions, stress or fatigue can trigger old communication "muscle memory". What specific situations make it hardest to stay in your new habit? Identifying these triggers now allows you to pre-program a better response for later. If you revert to an old pattern, don't spiral. Be patient with yourself and your partner. Forgive quickly and pivot back to the new skill as soon as you realize what happened. Knowing why you haven't mastered this skill yet is half the battle. Anticipating the obstacle now prepares you to handle it with grace when it inevitably arises. Foreseeing an obstacle isn't expecting failure; it's building a roadmap for recovery. What potential "roadblocks" might cause you to revert to your old habit instead of your new one?

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Obstacles to Overcome" for your plan.

1. The "busy trap;" letting work or chores dictate connection; assuming we'll talk "when there's time"; the daily "grind"; kids' activities.
2. "Roommate Syndrome"- only discussing logistics (bills/kids); relying on "accidental" connection; fatigue.
3. Lack of privacy at home or in public; kids needing attention; the TV on; the "distraction trap"
4. Work deadlines; physical stressors; impulsiveness; wanting to "get it off my chest" regardless of their state.
5. The "Urgency Trap"—feeling a talk must happen now, even if the setting is bad. Looking like I'm avoiding talking.
6. Viewing dates as "just a number"; forgetting the emotional weight of anniversaries or losses. Using the excuse "I'm bad with dates" to justify lack of preparation
7. Habitual screen use or background noise; "multi-tasking" while talking; fear of "the silence"; a cluttered physical space that creates mental "static."
8. Assuming my appearance doesn't matter anymore; ignoring my partner's preferences; believing they should love me no matter how I look.
9. Thinking "anywhere will do." Failing to notice or care where my partner is most comfortable. Assuming that the environment won't affect a high-stakes talk.

10. Different "chronotypes" (Morning Bird vs. Night Owl). Expecting a partner to be articulate and patient when their biological clock is at a low point.
11. Concerns over cost or travel time; assuming my own favorite place is better; forgetting that a change of scenery (e.g. porch, park, bench) can shift the tone of a talk.
12. Being unaware or dismissive of how our biology reacts to surroundings; believing it shouldn't matter if the heart is right.

Your Plans:

Husband: Overcome Obstacles
Wife: Overcome Obstacles

Step: 3 – Prepare for Action

In this step, you will build the "how-to" blueprint for your new habit. A commitment without a plan is just a wish. To succeed, you need to prepare your environment and your mind for consistent practice. How will you remind yourself to use this skill in the heat of the moment? Is there anything you need to study or have ready? Decide exactly when and where you are most likely to practice. Preparation means removing the friction so that when the moment arises, you don't have to think—you just act.

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Action Preparation" for your plan.

1. Review the weekly calendar together. Block out non-negotiable "connection windows." Prioritize the relationship over the to-do list. Refuse to let a calendar crisis become a marriage crisis.
2. Establish a daily "Check-in" and a weekly "Deep Dive." Treat these as non-negotiable appointments. Set a recurring invite. Have a "question of the day" ready.
3. Agree on a "safe signal" that means "I need to talk privately soon." Ensure physical privacy so we can be fully vulnerable. Silence phones, close doors, eliminate distractions.
4. Assess the "Emotional Weather" first. Ask: "Is now a good time, or would [X] be better?" Check "HALT" (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired) before a discussion.
5. Pause and Redirect: "This is too important for a car ride. Can we talk tonight at 8?" Always offer an alternative time if I postpone a talk. Commit to the follow-up.
6. Mark my calendar in advance with recurring alerts. Set "one-week-out" reminders so I can plan a gesture or gift. Ask: "How are you feeling today?" during "tough dates" (e.g., loss of a parent or past trauma).
7. Initiate a "clear the clutter" session so we can relax in a clean space. Turn off the TV. Put phones in a basket, drawer, or another room. Square my shoulders to signal total focus. Ensure background music is quiet and soothing, not distracting.
8. Learn what my partner specifically appreciates. Ask: "What's one thing I wear that makes you feel like I'm making an effort for you?" Choose to dress up occasionally specifically for them, even if there is no outside audience.
9. Test different environments: a porch, a park bench, a coffee shop. Observe where my partner opens up most (e.g., side-by-side on a walk vs. face-to-face at the table). Lead them to those spaces for important discussions.
10. Identify my partner's "Peak Clarity" time. Schedule meaningful or difficult talks during this window. Ask: "Do you have the mental energy for a talk right now, or would it be better after [coffee/rest/food]?"
11. Ask: "Where is it easiest for you to open up and talk? Where do you feel most safe to share your heart?" Incorporate nature or their favorite indoor nook into my weekly rhythm. Suggest a change of venue when things feel "stale."
12. Experiment with "mood lighting" to suit the activity (dim for intimacy, bright for logistics). Learn their "sensory triggers." Make it a habit to "set the stage" before inviting a deep conversation.

Your Plans:

Husband: Prepare for Action
Wife: Prepare for Action

Step: 4 – Establish Observable Indicators

Now, you will define what success looks like in real-time. First, visualize the win: Picture yourself using this new habit effectively over the next 21 days. Next, identify the evidence: What specific, real-world clues will tell you this habit is sticking? Then, write it in the “Now”: Describe these results in the present tense.

(The Science of “Now”: Writing in the present tense programs your subconscious to recognize these events as your current reality, making them much more likely to happen.)

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Observable Indicators" for your plan.

1. I am proactive, not reactive. My partner feels prioritized over my workload or social obligations.
2. We have a predictable rhythm - a consistent “coffee date” or “evening walk.” I don't have to “hunt down” my partner to be heard.
3. We both feel "focused on." Neither of us is glancing at a screen. The shared space feels like a sanctuary.
4. We respect each other's physical/emotional limits. We rarely have "exhaustion-driven" blowups.
5. We avoid "trapping" each other. We trust that "not now" doesn't mean "never."
6. My calendar is a map of my partner's heart. My partner feels their emotional history is actively honored, not just tolerated.
7. My partner doesn't have to compete with a device or a chore for my attention. Eye contact is consistent. I am not “scanning” the room for something else to do.
8. My partner feels respected because I prioritize being attractive to them. I am intentional about my presentation, showing that our “ordinary” time together is still special.
9. Important matters are discussed where we are both most relaxed. The setting helps rather than hinders. We instinctively know which topics work best for a walk vs. a seated dinner.
10. We have fewer "brain fog" arguments. My partner feels respected and capable of participating fully because I'm not catching them at their weakest.
11. We have "Go-To" spots that trigger an immediate sense of peace. Our environment actively supports our connection rather than working against it.
12. The atmosphere feels intentional rather than accidental. My partner's physical comfort is prioritized, allowing them to relax their posture and their guard.

Your Plans:

Husband: Establish Observable Indicators
Wife: Establish Observable Indicators

Step: 5 – See the Benefits

Visualizing the payoff is one of the most powerful ways to stay motivated when things get difficult. By defining exactly what you stand to gain, you give your brain a reason to prioritize this new habit over old patterns. Fast-forward to the payoff: Imagine it is 21 days from now and you've mastered this skill. What are the benefits?

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Benefits" for your plan.

1. Lowers stress. Keeps connection alive. Ensures the relationship is the "engine," not a passenger. Prevents "drifting" like "ships in the night".
2. Prevents "drifting apart" during busy seasons. Provides a "shared inner world" and "safety net." Gives us something to look forward to.
3. Higher-quality connection in less time. We each feel like the "only person in the room." Deeper focus; lasting solutions.
4. Prevents unnecessary fights. Sets conversations up for success. Decisions are made with a clear head rather than an irritable heart.
5. Ensures both of us are "fully present." Increases the chance of a successful resolution.
6. Deepens the bond. Validates that I care about what they care about. Makes them feel deeply known and valued. Heals old wounds with new attentiveness.
7. Validates my partner's importance. Creates a relaxing "sanctuary" at home. Allows for faster resolution of issues because I am fully present and catching subtle cues.
8. Boosts confidence. Builds a culture of appreciation. Maintains physical attraction necessary for long-term romance. Signals "You're worth the effort."
9. Reduces environmental anxiety. A relaxing physical environment lowers cortisol levels, keeping both of us in the "receptive zone." Makes "hard talks" feel easier and more natural.
10. Maximizes mental focus. Reduces the frustration of "talking to a wall" when a partner is physically drained. Leads to clearer thinking, and better decisions and outcomes.
11. Builds a "Shared Inner World." Nature or favorite spots lower cortisol and boost openness. The setting does half the work of "opening up" a healthy substantive conversation.
12. Creates a "sensory sanctuary" that physically calms the nervous system. Lighting signals the psychological and biological shift from work-mode to soul-mode.

Your Plans:

Husband: See the Benefits
Wife: See the Benefits

Step 6 – Cost of Inaction

Growth takes effort, but staying stuck has its own price. To stay committed, you must be honest about what happens if you choose not to change. What is the "cost of inaction" for your relationship? Think about the impact on your home, your connection, and your energy. If these old habits continue, what will the "vibe" of your home feel like in six months? How will your emotional intimacy or friendship suffer if this skill isn't mastered? What is the mental and emotional toll of repeating the same arguments or misunderstandings?

The Reality Check: Inaction isn't free; it costs you the peace and connection you deserve. Write down what you stand to lose if you revert to your old patterns.

Example:

Find your selected skill number below to see examples of "Costs of Inaction" for your plan.

1. If communication is "optional," it stops. You know the schedule, but not the soul.
2. Without a rhythm, conversations become purely transactional. Intimacy withers into a business relationship.
3. "Drive-by" conversations lead to shallow living. Important details are missed or forgotten.
4. Talking while "flooded" leads to "Zingers" and regrettable words that can't be taken back.
5. Forcing a talk in a bad environment leads to defensiveness and "shutting down."
6. Forgetting or ignoring a significant date feels like a "silent rejection" of the partner's heart. It signals that their history isn't worth the effort of a calendar entry.

7. Distractions signal "you aren't a priority." It creates a sense of being invisible or secondary. Over time, the partner stops trying to share.
8. Neglecting appearance can signal "I've stopped trying." It can contribute to a loss of romantic spark and the feeling that the "chase" is over and the passion is dead.
9. Using the wrong setting (crowded or noisy) can cause a partner to "clam up." The discomfort of the environment creates a psychological barrier that prevents deep connection.
10. Picking the wrong time leads to irritation, poor memory of the talk, and eventual resentment. It sets the partner up for failure by demanding a level of focus they literally can't provide.
11. Staying in high-stress spots keeps the body in "task-mode." The brain stays focused on to-do lists rather than heart-sharing, making intimacy feel like an interruption.
12. Harsh lights can kill the mood and make the nervous system feel "exposed," preventing the physiological safety needed for vulnerability, intimacy and openness.

Your Plans:

Husband: Cost of Inaction
Wife: Cost of Inaction

Step: 7 – Praise Your Progress

Building a great marriage is a marathon, not a sprint. To keep your momentum high for the next 21 days, you need a way to celebrate the wins—both the ones your partner notices and the ones you achieve internally.

- Don't wait for perfection. Praise each other (and yourself) for the effort of trying, even if the execution isn't flawless yet. You can actually hack your habits with rewards: Studies show that rewarding a new behavior immediately after it happens makes the habit stick 3x faster.
- Design personal rewards: Discuss what actually feels like a reward to you. Include the "micro-wins" (a favorite coffee) and the "big wins" (uninterrupted time for a hobby).
- Design mutual rewards: Create a plan for "Milestone Rewards" you can enjoy together. This adds an element of fun and teamwork to the practice.
- Look inward: While partner praise is wonderful, don't rely on it exclusively. Acknowledge your own growth and reward yourself; self-motivation is what turns a 21-day practice into a lifetime habit.

Use these ideas to build your own custom reward system. Mix and match small daily "high-fives" with larger milestone celebrations.

Personal Rewards (Solo Refuel)

- \$20 Coffee gift card
- An hour of solo hobby time
- A "Sleep-in Pass" (partner handles kids/chores)
- New outfit or book
- A day of fishing or a round of golf
- A night out with friends
- A professional massage
- A long, relaxing bath
- A favorite snack or special dessert

Group Rewards (Couple Connection)


- Coffee date
- A long walk
- Lunch or dinner out together
- A movie night (theater or home)
- A romantic evening (planned by partner)
- Tickets to a sporting event or concert
- Tech-free evening (phones away after 7pm)
- A good surprise!

Your Plans:

Husband: Praise Your Progress
Wife: Praise Your Progress

Congratulations! Your Environment Action Plan is Complete.

You have successfully mapped out your strategy for creating better environments for your communication. Before you move forward, we encourage you to print your plan using the button below. Keep it in a place where you can review it daily.

 **A Prayer for Our Journey:** *Lord, thank You for the clarity and commitment we've found today. As we move from planning to practice, give us the strength to remain consistent and the grace to support one another. Amen.*



Visualize Success Creating the Right Environment

Prepare your mind to execute your new skill with confidence and clarity.

Your mind has a remarkable ability to shape your reality. By mentally visualizing a positive and supportive environment for your interactions – seeing and feeling the atmosphere you desire – you’re preparing your brain to create that very space. Ready to cultivate the environment you desire for a deeper connection? Let’s explore how.

Option 1: Quick Guided Visualization: “Practice Makes Progress”

This brief, 5-minute visualization will help you quickly align your mind for harmonious communication with your partner. Before you dive in, map out the conversation you wish to visualize:

1. When and where will your uninterrupted conversation take place?
2. What will your partner look and sound like?
3. Which specific speaking skill will you be focusing on?
4. How do you want to feel during this interaction?



VIDEO: A Quick Visualization for Connection

vimeo.com/1177129614

Option 2: Deeper Guided Visualization: Environment – “Your Sanctuary of Connection”

To deepen your practice of choosing effective environments for communication with your partner, try this immersive 16-minute guided visualization led by Diantha Cavin. This visualization will guide you through a conversation in a carefully chosen setting, allowing you to experience firsthand how specific environmental elements—like time, place, lighting, comfort, and even clothing—contribute to a more connected and productive discussion.



VIDEO: Visualization Exercise: Environment

vimeo.com/1177129641

NOTE: Advance to 8:20 if you want to skip the relaxation exercise and go directly to the Environment Visualization Practice.

Option 3: Self-Guided Exercise

Alternatively, you can follow the steps at your own pace, with the printable visualization guide.

NOTE: The visualization videos and guide are also available on your member Resources tab.



Affirm Your Partner

Become a "Success Coach" to empower and multiply the positive changes you see.



"Caught Ya" Cards



Heartgrams



Environment Action Deck

To follow along in the Facilitator's Guide, see "Affirm Your Partner" in the Listening Pillar.



Execute Your Environment Plan

Put your goals into motion and track your progress toward creating effective environments.


You are improving the setting and timing of your conversations. Your commitment to controlling this environment, which is the frame that holds your communication, ensures your message has the greatest chance of landing successfully. Keep these three keys in mind as you move forward:

1. **Timing is Everything:** Just as “the right word spoken at the right time is as beautiful as gold apples in a silver bowl,” controlling the timing of your discussion is critical. If your partner is tired, honor that need and ask them to give you a half hour of relaxation before engaging in conversation.
2. **Demand Attention:** Eliminate distractions. If external noise or a device (like the TV) is interfering with your discussion, ask your partner to turn it off. Actively choose a place where you can comfortably be alone for a period of time.
3. **Your Presence Matters:** The non-negotiable ground rules of sitting side-by-side, maintaining eye contact, and having an open posture reinforce your mutual goal of understanding.

Commitment and Next Steps

By mastering the environment, you ensure every conversation begins with dignity and respect. As you conclude this exploration of your communication environment, remember that creating a haven for your marriage is an ongoing journey, not a destination. Just as a garden needs constant tending, so too does your relationship. May the insights you’ve gained here blossom into tangible improvements in your daily life together. Lean on each other, and on God, as you cultivate this vital aspect of your bond. Remember: “Ask and you shall receive” – both the wisdom to discern the right path and the strength to walk it hand-in-hand.

Your Action Plan is your personal guide. Put your chosen skill into practice, and watch as the positive changes unfold. Don’t forget the power of appreciation! Actively acknowledge and celebrate your partner’s efforts. Even small gestures of recognition will nurture a climate of gratitude and encouragement, fostering deeper connection and intimacy.

 **PRAYER:** *Father, help us to be intentional protectors of our marriage. Give us the wisdom to set boundaries that honor You and one another. As we make these practical changes in our schedule and our home, we ask that You would fill our environment with Your presence. May our home be a place of rest, laughter, and safety for us both. Amen.*

Dedicate the next 21 days to practicing your new environment skill. Afterward, retaking the entire Marriage Mirror or revisiting specific areas can be a great way to see your progress and stay motivated. Simply click a tab and select “Retake”. Use the tabs to easily navigate between active sections.

You have a full year to benefit from the Marriage Mirror. It is our sincere hope and prayer that God will bless your marriage richly as you continue to grow together and become ever more attuned to His will for your lives.

To bring our program to a close, please take a moment to view these concluding remarks by Phyllis Halverson.



VIDEO: Receiving God’s help as you build your marriage – Phyllis Halverson
vimeo.com/1180591778




Congratulations!

You've dedicated significant time, energy, and patience to building effective communication in your marriage, and that's a tremendous achievement. You've gained valuable insights into the power of communication to shape and strengthen your relationship. As you continue to practice and refine these skills, you'll experience many wonderful benefits.

To help you track your progress and stay motivated, you can access your work and retake the Marriage Mirror as often as you'd like for a full year. We encourage you to do so – you'll be amazed by the positive changes you see!

-Art Robertson, Ph.D., Founder of the Marriage Mirror

 **PRAYER:** *"Father, we thank You for the journey we've taken through the Marriage Mirror. We have seen ourselves, we have seen each other, and we have seen Your grace at work. We commit these new habits—Listening, Speaking, and the Environment we share—into Your hands. We promise to keep looking into Your Word as our ultimate mirror, that we may be transformed more and more into Your image. Bless our union, strengthen our bond, and may our love be a light to everyone around us. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

We'd Love Your Feedback (Optional)

As you put your new skills into practice, we would love to hear about your experience. Your insights help us refine the Marriage Mirror and continue strengthening marriages just like yours.

Ask attendees to complete the Feedback Form in their Attendee Worksheets or member portal. (NOTE: The portal Feedback Form does not include W1, W2 or W3.)

Marriage Mirror Workshop Feedback Form

Thank you for participating in the Marriage Mirror Workshop. Your honest feedback is invaluable as we strive to strengthen marriages. Please rate the following statements based on your experience.

SCALE: 1 (STRONGLY AGREE) 2 (AGREE) 3 (DISAGREE) 4 (STRONGLY DISAGREE)	1	2	3	4
W1. The physical location and setup were conducive to open discussion.				
W2. The pace of the session(s) was appropriate for learning.				
W3. The group setting enhanced my learning through mutual encouragement.				
1. The Assessments clearly identified my communication habits and my partner's perspective.				
2. The Discussion Covenant prepared us to navigate our Assessment Review productively.				
3. The Discussion Hints and Motivation Tips provided valuable support for our conversation and habit practice.				
4. The material was relevant to our marriage.				
5. The program helped us integrate God's perspective into our communication.				
6. The Visualization Guide helped me mentally prepare to apply my new skill.				
7. The Action Plan was useful in helping me create actionable steps for applying my new chosen skill.				
8. I feel confident in implementing the new habits in my Action Plan(s).				
9. The Caught Ya Cards, Heartgrams, and Action Decks were useful tools for reinforcing new habits.				
10. The navigation of the site was smooth and logical (<i>if applicable/online version</i>).				
11. (If you completed ONLY the Listening Pillar*) I feel equipped to complete the remaining Pillars.				
12. I would recommend the Marriage Mirror program to other couples.				
13. What was the most valuable part of the Marriage Mirror workshop for you?				
14. What is one thing that could be improved or changed about the Marriage Mirror program?				
15. Do you have any further comments for the facilitator or program developers?				

Please email a scan or photo of your completed Feedback Form to info@marriagemirror.com.