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Autonomous Corrections Exercise

The following exercise is a real game-changer for many couples. It requires that both of you cooperate. However, the focus is not what happens between you. The focus is shifted to a struggle within each of you. The struggle is between your higher consciousness that loves meaning and integrity versus your lower consciousness that values your comfort or pride in your image. (Most of us have the latter narcissistic level within us.)

Love thrives in an atmosphere of safety. Unfortunately, many of us give way to impulses that make us feel powerful or important in the moment. In doing so, we violate some very important principles that keep our relationship safe. If we lie, rage, ridicule, use sarcasm to shame our partner or ignore our commitments, then our partner will accumulate fear and shame. It's an unconscious process that gradually kills love. We could call this "love erosion."

To reverse the erosion of love, we need to train ourselves to prioritize principles over our impulses. This requires training like learning to ride a bike. You can't learn to ride a bike from reading the manual. You have to practice. The skills need to become automatic. In a similar manner, the Autonomous Corrections exercise trains certain principles to over-rule primitive impulses. The principles eventually guide your behavior automatically. More than that, they can eventually protect you from disapproval. Your emotional vulnerability will decrease as your integrity grows stronger.

There are many principles that promote a relationship but 5 are critical for promoting safety. We can call them The Big Five:

Inviolacy – Personal boundaries are protected against the urge for physical or emotional violence. There's a restraint from hitting, blocking, undesired grabbing, mocking, sarcasm, or other emotional manipulations that are designed to shame the other. There's also mindfulness to avoid hurting our partner in small ways with our carelessness. We avoid giving commands or unnegotiated rules as if we are superior. We don't interrupt sentences, tell our partner what he/she thinks or feels, or demand that our partner responds on our preferred timeline.

Honesty – Both internal and external truths are held in high regard and are not misrepresented. External truths pertain to the external world (e.g. JFK got shot, Armstrong walked on the moon). Internal truths pertain to personal experience (e.g. a person prefers a certain color or a partner is

afraid that if he/she asks for what he/she really wants that his/her partner will painfully disappoint him/her). Honesty doesn't mean that a partner must disclose. It would be honest if a partner declares "I'm going to keep this private and I don't want to talk with you about it just now."

Fidelity – Agreements (contracts) are faithfully kept. The person has a sense of honor in being consistent and fulfilling responsibilities. When he/she forgets to fulfill an obligation he/she follows due-diligence to repair and plan for corrections.

Accountability - This principle involves the valuing of objective truth about one's actions. A person who is willing to be accountable is willing to have his/her behavior measured against objective evidence that he/she is being responsible. Making available phone records, bank statements or even expert consultations are all examples of applied accountability. One's ego and secrecy don't rule. There's also an obligation to give audience to a partner who is upset and wants to talk about it. Stone-walling is avoided.

Equity - Intimate partners are viewed as being equally deserving of benefits from the relationship. This principle of equality also extends to equalizing sacrifice. Division of labor, equalizing of leisure time, turn-taking in choices for fun may also be managed with the principle that one partner doesn't deserve more than another.

Exercise Phases & Steps

Phase I (Completed before meeting with your partner)

Make many copies of the preparation sheet at the end of this document. On one of the sheets, write down the following:

- 1) Choose a memory of an occasion when you violated one of the major relationship principles.
- 2) Write an outline of the general circumstances of your violation.
- 3) Specify what vulnerable emotion you were trying to avoid when you violated the principle. Was it shame?, Fear of shame? Fear of another sort? It's probably not what you allowed yourself to feel. It was probably covered by anger, lying or some other defense.
- 4) Specify the principle or combination of principles that you violated.
- 5) Specify what you did that violated the principle(s). (Your behavior)

- 6) Spend some time to imagine what vulnerable feelings your partner must have felt from your violation. Don't get distracted if your partner expressed anger. Imagine the type of hurt/fear/humiliation that was underneath the anger. Really allow yourself to feel it. Then detail it out in written form but **WITHOUT AN APOLOGY**. (Compassion without an apology)
- 7) Specify what you wish you had done instead that would have been consistent with the principle(s).
- 8) Specify what you plan to do to train yourself so that you won't violate the principle(s) again. What's your plan of correction? An apology is not a plan. It's often a cop-out to placate your partner.

Phase II (Completed with your partner present)

- 1) **Ask** your partner **when** he/she would be willing to witness some self-growth on your partner. When could you schedule an "autonomous correction" with him/her?
- 2) When you both finally meet, ask if your partner is willing to say absolutely nothing while you practice the exercise. No remarks, no questions, nothing. Also ask if your partner would not give you any feedback or questions about what you tell him/her for at least 24 hours. If your partner doesn't clearly commit to this, then don't go forward with the exercise.
- 3) **THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP IN THE EXERCISE** (And it's all inside your mind): Use internal speech to tell yourself that you're **not** doing this exercise for your partner. You're doing it to strengthen your loyalty to the principle and to strengthen your **FUTURE INTEGRITY**. It's for your future self. (If you ignore this step the exercise might be of little benefit.)
- 4) Use your prepared sheet to guide you through the rest of the exercise. You will be practicing truth and accountability over comfort. The challenge will help burn it in.
- 5) When finished, thank your partner and don't ask for feedback.

How to practice:

Make several copies of the Session Log page at the end of this instruction sheet. After you finish each autonomous correction exercise, write down your observations on the page.

What did you notice about what you felt and thought, during and after the exercise? Bring your session log to your therapist for review. If you don't have a therapist, ask a close friend to be an accountability partner to help motivate you. You should practice 1 time each day for a total of 50 to 60 times. It will become second nature to you after a while.

What to expect:

The initial practice sessions may be uncomfortable. You may feel fear. It will get easier with practice. It won't take long before you start to notice your violations shortly after you do them. These occasions become practice fodder. With more practice you will notice when you're about to violate a principle and you will correct your impulse before you execute the violation. Over time, both of you will gain respect at seeing each other struggling to shift the relationship to a higher level of trust. Affection and attraction will be released.

**Make multiple copies of the following two pages.
Make more copies of the practice sheet.**

Preparation Sheet

Remember to:

- 1) Get the agreement from your partner for no comments or feedback.
- 2) Tell yourself your main objective is to strengthen the principle and your future integrity

Briefly outline the situation when you violated the principle.

Specify the underlying vulnerable feeling you were trying to avoid or that knocked you off balance. If you were angry, what vulnerable emotion was underneath the anger?

Specify the principle or principles that you violated:

Specify what you did or how you acted that violated the principle(s):

Detail what emotions you think your partner felt on the receiving end of your violation. Go into depth.

Describe what you wish you had done instead that would have maintained the principle(s).

Detail your plan for training yourself to avoid the same violation in the future.

