



# IMAGO

## Create the relationship of your dreams

BY CINDY RICARDO, LMHC, IRT

**A**re you struggling in a marriage or committed relationship? Do you feel stuck, frustrated or disconnected from your partner or spouse? Does it often seem as if you each speak a different language, making it impossible to hear, listen and understand each other? Are you spending more time away from your partner? Are you looking for emotional support elsewhere? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are not alone.

Many couples enter committed relationships with the hope and dream of having a loving, supportive and intimate relationship that will last a lifetime. When this doesn't happen they end up feeling disillusioned, hurt, angry and betrayed. They begin to see each other as enemies, go on the defensive and become guarded. It is as if they put on a suit of armor, stockpile weapons and get ready to battle it out. When this happens they have entered the red zone, also known as the power struggle.

### THE POWER STRUGGLE - IF YOU DON'T SEE THINGS MY WAY YOU ARE CRAZY!

Ever see the movie "War of the Roses"? This is the couple that hates each other; engages in name calling, assuming, judging, analyzing, dismissing and in a hundred other ways keep each other at arm's length. They engage in full blown arguments where words fly like well directed missiles, resentments build like dirt swept under the rug and partners seriously contemplate selling their mate on e-bay to the lowest bidder. It is during this time that partners find ways of exiting the relationship (affairs, alcoholism, work, surfing the net and other distractions) to escape the painful distress, misunderstanding and distance present in their relationship.

During the power struggle, no one is listening, partners frequently interrupt each other and are highly reactive. Empathy, understanding and compassion, which are so desperately needed, are missing in action. It can be the most frightening, scary and hurtful stage of a relationship.

### WHY DOES THE POWER STRUGGLE HAPPEN?

Think about what children do when they want attention, love or soothing. They cry, yell, scream, have temper tantrums, sulk and withdraw. Sound familiar? Of course! Adults do a grown up version of this. They are basically saying, "If I don't cry, yell, or scream loud enough no one will hear me" The power struggle is

actually a cry for connection that is communicated through blame, shame and criticism. It's a learned behavior that just doesn't work well in adult relationships and keeps couples feeling unheard, unhappy and disconnected. In order to heal and grow in relationship couples must learn a different way of communicating that will help them build and sustain a safe, supportive and loving relationship.

### WHAT IF IT WERE POSSIBLE TO CREATE THE PARTNERSHIP OF YOUR DREAMS?

Imago Relationship Therapy offers couples the opportunity to create a safe, loving and intimate relationship. This approach has helped millions of couples transform their relationship. It was developed by Dr. Harville Hendrix, and Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt and is based on their experience of mending relationships, including their own marriage. An indication of the success of Imago is that Oprah Winfrey included "Imago Theory" in her list of "Unforgettable! Oprah's Top 20 Shows." Response to Harville Hendrix's recent appearance on "The Oprah Show" was so strong that the Imago book, "Getting The Love You Want," was back yet again on the New York Times Bestseller list this past May.

For couples, Imago is a way to step outside of yourself in the relationship and sit with your partner in a safe, non-threatening way and find out more about the person you love most in the world.

I use Imago Relationship Therapy to help a couple transform their relationship by teaching them how to:

- Become a safe, healing and loving presence for each other
- Connect through empathy and compassion instead of contempt and anger
- Take responsibility for their own feelings
- Understand how they each contribute to the conflict
- Approach conflict in a different way so that they learn more about each other and develop deeper intimacy, passion and joy.

As Maya Kollman, a wonderful and wise Master Trainer of Imago Relationship Therapy says, "Relationship is not about finding the right partner; it is about becoming the right partner." ☒

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