

FamilyEXPO²⁰⁰²

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE & FAMILY

A one-day parenting seminar full of effective and practical ideas and strategies

An Edited Transcript of the Presentation by
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on
The Art of Giving and Receiving Criticism
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This is one topic where it is truly better to give than to receive!

Let me introduce a concept to you. There is no such thing as constructive criticism. That's one of those oxymorons. An oxymoron means that one word takes all the meaning out of the other. "He was a wise fool." What sense does that make? To construct is to build or to edify. To criticise is to find fault or to tear down. Those are two different processes. It would be like saying, "I'm going to ride the lift up-down." "What? Are you going up or down?" "No, I'm going to do both at the same time." Now, you can go up or you can go down, but you can't go up-down. Nor can you constructively criticise. Criticism is inherently fault finding and you are asking for a change. It's OK. There is necessary criticism. I'm not saying that we can't criticise. I'm saying that you'd better understand what you're doing.

Now, we've just finished a tremendous amount of research in the United States on why marriages fail – why relationships fail. The number one reason is the inability to resolve conflicts in healthy ways.

There are certain toxic traits that many of us have acquired. Now, it's one thing to have a toxic trait and it's another thing to have, what I call, a toxic personality. I am situationally toxic. That is, if you put me into a football situation I get toxic. I'm up there in the stands, frothing at the mouth and glassy-eyed. Or if I get behind the wheel of a car at times and get on the freeway and find these insane drivers out there, then I can become situationally toxic.

It's easy to become situationally toxic about the government and easy to find fault, but one of the first things I do with my students at the university when they take this class on communication is that I give them what I call the 24 hour challenge. Now the 24 hour challenge is to go for 24 hours, without criticising any person for any reason. Not anyone - not the government, not anyone for 24 hours and you can count sleeping time.

Now imagine how difficult that would be. It's very difficult. I remember thinking, when Bonnie and I accepted this challenge many years ago, that I'll ace this, meaning: I'll get through it in a very short time, I'm sure. It took me 3 weeks and what was killing me was driving. Somehow I'd get up there on the road and then I'd turn and yell, "Stupid driver!", "What an idiot that guy is out there!" and "What a nut!" and I'd find myself being critical. Bonnie was able to do it in one week and it took me three weeks! And still to this day, it's a frustration to me that I couldn't do it, with all my education and training, before she did. A little competition there, but the point is this 24 hour challenge.

In a group about this size I would guess that if you tried right now, and we met again a week from today, next Saturday, that there would only be 20 of you, out of a group approximately 800, that would have been able to make it for one complete consecutive 24 hour period of time, without falling into that habit of being critical. It is a habit, but it's a counter-productive habit and it is destroying to relationships.

Now some of us think that that's our job description. I had a situation in Seattle Washington, where this woman, we'll call her Trina, that's not her real name, but for our purposes it will be her name. Trina came in to see me and her husband was a former student of mine. What had happened is he had applied for a divorce. He had a tape. He audio taped Trina talking to their children. She was one of these mothers, that is constantly screaming at her children - just screaming and yelling and criticising. Constantly doing it. And so that was her job description as a mother, to scream and be critical of the children, constantly doing that. Well, her husband recorded about five hours of this on audio tape. When he applied for a divorce the judge listened to about twenty minutes of it. and he gave the man the house, custody of all five children, told her to go out and get a job and pay alimony and child support - because she was an unfit mother.

Well, could you appreciate that when she came in to my office, she was a very serious person. Her husband said, "I'll only visit with you if you'll go to Dr Lund." So that kind of narrowed the field. So when she came in to see me this was one motivated woman, very intense. There was a 90 day period waiting for a divorce and they were in that ninety day period. This is before she is going to lose her house, her husband and her five children, in one wonderful, fell swoop. She just wouldn't, couldn't imagine it. It would just never be - it was just some mistake. No, you're an unfit mother, that's just it. Wow, scary!

Trina said to me, "What do I have to do?" and I said, "Trina, normally I'd give a person a little period of time to work with this, but I think we're in very desperate circumstances. I want you to abstain from criticising 100 percent. Not one more critical word to leave your mouth - not one. Now you are living in the house here (and she's getting ready to make the transition out), so for this next week, I want you to not say one critical word to your husband or about yourself or about your children - I want you to go for one week without criticising anyone for any reason. Now that's it! And if you can't do that Trina, I won't talk to you! I won't! You go find somebody else!"

"But you're the only one!"

"Well bummer deal! Then, I guess that's your choice, isn't it?"

"Well, what about disciplining the children?"

"Well, he's going to wind up with a 100 percent of them anyway. So Dad, we're going to make you responsible to be the person who's going to be giving discipline. So you're now endowed 100 percent with the responsibility of disciplining these children. OK? Trina, you're responsible to go home and love these children, that's your responsibility. You find ways of communicating love. You let go of criticising them. Not one more word."

The next week she came into my office with her husband and erupted into tears when she saw me. I think I have that effect on my wife at times. She erupted into these tears and started sobbing and it wasn't just a kind of crying, it was a deep scary ooaaahhhhhh kind of a cry. She was sobbing and I said, "Now Trina, just calm down. Take a few breaths. Take a minute if you need to here and take some deep breaths now and relax and tell me what's wrong."

"You don't understand, you don't understand."

“You’re right.” I looked at her husband and I said, “She didn’t make it, huh?” He said, “No, she made it! She had a great week! She didn’t criticise me, she didn’t criticise the children. It was the best week of our marriage. It was a great week! I don’t know why she’s like this.”

“Trina, what’s wrong?”

“You don’t understand. I don’t know how to love! When I didn’t have anything critical to say, I didn’t have anything to say. I thought that was my job description. That was the way my mum treated me! And so, when I didn’t have anything to say - I - I don’t know how to love!”

Isn’t that incredible? Without something critical to say she had nothing to say, because that’s what she thought her job description was. “Pick this up!” “Stop doing that!” “What are you doing wrong here?” “Stop picking on you brother!” “Don’t eat your food that way!” That’s her job description! When she couldn’t do it, it was amazing!

There is a set of skills that begin with abstaining from being critical. I try to take them through a process. The first process is to experience abstinence of criticism. Not that they’re going to live the rest of their life that way, that’s not realistic. There are times that we need to be willing to have the courage to be critical, when necessary, but for most of us it’s an out-of-control behaviour. We’re kind of like a hand grenade where somebody pulled the pin and you never know when we are going to go off. Whatever circumstance or whatever situation might arise, we just get into this anger or this spewing forth of criticism. It raises the question, “What gives me a right to criticise? What gives me the right?”

Well, in a relationship of equals - and a husband and wife relationship, by the way, was a decision that was made by common consent. Most men don’t bring their wives to the altar in a headlock, “Tell him, yes!” No, it was a voluntary commitment we both made - it is a relationship of equals. And as a relationship of equals, what gives me the right to criticise my spouse? And the answer is - her permission.

“Well, now I’ve got a thought, and I’m frustrated. And since I have a thought and I have a mouth, that’s the only authority I need! So I can just say whatever I want to say whenever I want to say it!” Well, that works if you’re the general. It doesn’t work in a relationship of equals.

What gives you the right to criticise is the permission of the person you’re going to criticise. Well, what if she never gives you the permission? Bummer deal. In a relationship of equals we begin with the premise, that I need to speak to her in the language of respect and request. I’m not her parent.

Now let me just review with you another principle. All relationships tend to fall in one of three categories. You’re either (one) a boss - a mother/father figure, or (two) you’re an equal, co-equal, you’re a brother/sister relationship. (Although most brothers and sisters don’t necessarily treat each other as equals.) By the way, a husband and wife relationship is a relationship of equals of a brother/sister status. Or (three) you’re in a supervised employee position or a child position.

Do you realise that there is a language that is appropriate to each of those stewardships? There is a stewardship that is appropriate for a child and a language consistent with that. We call that language of a child, “permission language”. That would be the language of, “May I?”, “Can I have a friend come over?”, “I would like to go with my mates and go do this or do that”. The whole idea here is that that’s the, “Can I, may I” child language or permission language.

The language of an adult who may be a parent or boss is going to be “directive language”. Now directive language is where you can tell someone what they should, what they need or what they ought to be doing. As a father I can tell my children what they should, need and ought to be doing. “Now you need to be in tonight at 9 o’clock” and “I want you to get your homework”, “You should do this and you need to do that”. That is legitimate for me. Now that is called directive language.

But it is not appropriate for me to speak to my wife as if she were a child! “Now honey you need to do this”, “I want you to get the clothes done by noon, and then I want you to clean my car”, and “You should and you need and you ought and you ought and you need and you should”. I am not her father. I am her husband, and she deserves to be spoken to with the language of “request and respect”. Now that is the language of, “It would mean a lot to me”, and “I would appreciate it if”.

Do you see that many of us take turns - and much of the time I see adults simply taking turns parenting each other - just taking turns - and a man saying, “You’re not my mother; don’t keep telling me what to do here”, or a woman saying, “You’re not my father; don’t be telling me what to do”. I’m not sure we’ve learned the language of respect and request, but it is critical and crucial to a successful relationship. So, “It would mean a lot to me”, “I would appreciate it if”, “Would you, will you, thank you, please” - those kinds of things. I’m not coming to her as a child, I’m coming to her as an equal and I’m making a request as an equal. “It would mean a lot to me”, and “I would appreciate it”. That’s why it’s important, because of this husband-wife relationship, for me to see and treat her as an equal.

By the way, that means that before I can criticise her I need to say something like this, “Bonnie, I have something that’s critical that I’d like to share with you. I don’t know what a good time would be. I can write it down or I can share it with you verbally. Maybe you could let me know how I could best communicate that. Is now a good time?” She may say, “You know what? I’m getting ready to go out and do some other things” or “I’ve got this meeting coming up”, (she works on the State of Utah Committee for Special Needs Children) and she may say, “You know what? I don’t need any negative thoughts right now to bother me as I go to that meeting. I want to keep my head clean and clear so that I can think positive thoughts as I go into that meeting. So frankly, I don’t want to hear your criticism right now.”

But I’ve got a thought! And I’m frustrated! And I want to say what I want to say! And I want to say it right now! And I don’t care whether you want to hear it or not!

By the way, why do you think most people criticise? Well, when you ask them they idealise, “Well, I’m just thinking about the other person and their best interest.” “Well, I have this information that I think would be valuable to them and help them become a better individual.” Not true! Most people criticise because they’re frustrated, because they have unmet expectations and they’re upset and they’re situationally out of sorts and so they unload, “ARRGH RRR AGHH RRRGH RRRGH! Now that was in your best interest.” So we philosophise about it being in their best interest, but the truth is that we’re venting, and we’re frustrated.

Now I think we’re entitled to be frustrated and that’s alright, but we need to be able to find ways of negotiating our differences and do it in healthy ways that don’t destroy the relationship in the process. That is one of the keys. That’s why we start with a policy of abstaining from criticism.

I ask my students, “Now I want you to tell me, what did you learn from this experience of trying to go for 24 hours without criticising any person for any reason?”

Let me tell you of a couple of experiences I had with that. One of them is this lady. I said, “Now tell me how did you do it.” She said, “It was easy. My husband and son were out of town!” Oh good! Good! Yeah, that was a real test! So it was easy. She didn’t have anyone to focus on to be critical.

I had a session with a married couple. I’ll never forget this couple. They really stood out because they were just physically different from one another. The man was 6ft 8 and looked like a bean pole – he turns to the side and you lose him for a second and then he turns back around, OK. And then his wife was 5ft 1. So you couldn’t just look at them you had to go like this see [*looking up and down*]. So she came up and she said “Dr Lund, I have a question for you about your assignment.” I said, “Well, what is it?”

“If you think it, but don’t say it, does it count?” I said, “Now listen. If the thought comes into your mind and you’re able, within 10 seconds or so, to get rid of it and channel it out somewhere else, we won’t count that against you. But if you let it settle in your mind and you start expanding it and do a quadraphonic, Vistavision, Dolby, Lucas, film thought, and it starts manifesting itself - yeah - there’s such a thing as non-verbal criticism and that would be one. And so, yes, you have to start your 24 hours over again.”

She said, “Oh wow, OK. I think I’ve got it. And what about criticising yourself?” I said, “No, no, no! I’m talking about no negative things about you either! Some of you are your worst critics! You’re going to beat anyone to the punch and your going to say something negative about yourself and it is not healthy for you to do that. It’s not true humility - it’s a false humility and it doesn’t serve you well, nor does it serve those who love you well. So lets just agree that we’re not going to do any type of criticism for 24 hours.”

And so she said (true story, folks. This was in Anaheim, California), “Alright, I’ll try. But he’ll never make it!” And he looked at her - this big tall guy looking at her goes, [*facial expression*] and I said, “That’s non-verbal criticism!” He said, “It is?” And I said to her, “Did you just hear what you just said? - ‘I’ll try, but he’ll never make it!’ - that’s verbal criticism!” She walked away talking to him saying, “This is going to be a lot harder than I thought!”

So no, it’s not easy. Believe me this is not an easy thing to do. But can you see the importance of this, that we need to learn to abstain from criticism? Now, I’m not saying you have to live the rest of your life that way.

I ask these students, “Now tell me what you’ve learned from that experience.”

“I learned that I’m very critical. I learned that I don’t have the control over myself that I thought I did, because I thought I’d just will myself into not criticising anymore and it would just happen. But it didn’t. It didn’t happen at all. Pretty soon I was saying, *It’s a dumb assignment, I don’t want to do it. I could have done it if I really wanted to of course but I really don’t want to do it anymore.*” And that’s because they got so tired of failing in the process! That’s a very, very difficult thing, and of course some of you could be wealthy if you decide to put a quarter or a 20 cent piece in a jar every time you criticise.

I said to this one lady on the art of receiving criticism, “I want you to disassociate. I want you to separate their criticism from your worth. I want you to separate your ego from your sense of worth and value. Can you do that? Can you focus on a independent issue, the issue here being that you have a very critical husband. I want you, every time he criticises you, to put one dollar in your mind, or wear a rubber band and snap it on your wrist, every time he criticises you and remind yourself “That’s one more dollar, turkey!” She doesn’t have to say that out loud! Just “ching ching ching” and the little dollar signs clicking up. And so Bonnie got a phone call from this

lady. She said, "Tell your husband, tell Dr Lund that I just bought an \$80 pair of shoes. He'll know what I mean." She managed to separate and not internalise his negativity. But that was a part of the art of receiving criticism, and we'll talk about that a little later.

Can you imagine having an abstinence policy, then followed by a containment policy that says (and here's the next assignment I give them). I want you to set up 15 minutes, once a week, (boy this is hard for people to do) where you're going to deal with criticism - and one man says, "I just can't get through that many days without criticising." I said, "Then set it up everyday, but it's still containment. And if you have to do it every day, then do it that way." But the general assignment is to try to setup for once a week where you have 15 minutes. Now we call that the red hour although technically it's not a full hour, it's only 15 minutes.

Now, here's what you do. [*To Bonnie*] Come on over here. I need your help. Thank you. Now, let's just talk about this for a moment, When we have a red hour, how do we work that? How does that work for us?

[*Bonnie*] Well, we bring our list. I think John's wanting me to say that my list is sometimes 2 or 3 pages.

And I bring my tiny little match book, with a couple of items scribbled. That's very typical in a relationship. Women have a list like this, guys have a list like that.

[*Bonnie*] But the idea is rather than me giving him this long list in spurts all day long,

Or whenever it pops into her head, "Here's an idea, pop, try that one!".

[*Bonnie*] I have to bite my tongue and write down the thought. And it does two things for the more critical person; which is, you know you have a time to be heard, so you don't have to say it right then. You know you're going to have 15 minutes at the end of the day or whenever you've set it up - that you're going to be able to say your thing. The other thing is, by the time you get to that 15 minutes, you've probably crossed off three quarters of what you would have said.

Which I think is a wonderful thing to do! What I was going to tell you was when we were doing this years ago, Bonnie would come with this list and then what you do is you set a timer. She has 7 ½ minutes. 7 ½ minutes of my undivided attention at which I'm geared up with my suit of armour on, because I've prepared for this. This is a root canal without Novocain. So we've got a painful experience here, but as a man I'm ready for it. Bring it on baby. Give me your best shot! She's got 7 ½ minutes. Well, why don't you tell them what you would do early on.

[*Bonnie*] Well at first I would try to convince him why I felt the way I did.

BING! The 7 ½ minutes was up! And she hadn't even got to one item yet. She was just giving me all this background information. Because the assumption was - if I had all of the background information, obviously I would come to the same conclusion that she did, which isn't true at all! But so, what happened?

[*Bonnie*] So I learned very quickly to just get to the bottom line.

Oh, she's good at that now! In 7 ½ minutes she can be a buzz saw, and I'm getting bottom line stuff, but I'm loving it! Good bottom line stuff, OK I can live with this. What it is that she actually expects of me, she's telling me, well you know "Our daughter this, blah blah blah," and you get this massive amount of information and - "What do you want?"

“Well, I’m getting to it.”

I need bottom line, “What do you want from me? I mean, when you’re all said and done?”

“I want you to talk to our daughter.”

It’s kind of interesting when we were first married she used to say things like this, “We need to talk to our daughter”, and I’m thinking “WE - that’s her and me. We are going in together, the two of us, and talking to our daughter”. But she had also used that same terminology when she spoke about taking out the garbage, she said, “We need to take out the garbage”, and I had a vision of her being on one side of the garbage can and me on the other. But WE isn’t WE! WE is ME! Isn’t that right! Well we had to kind of clear that up. So, don’t speak in the royal, queenly we. “We are tired”, the Queen can do it, but that’s a royal we. No, even though you are a queen, I just need the direct communication.

So the idea was we have 15 minutes. She has 7 ½ and I have 7 ½. Sometimes she gets through her 7 ½ minutes and she still has things to say. And then DING! the timer goes off and she’ll go “Darn!” and then she’ll say, “I guess it’s your turn” and I’ll say, “I don’t have anything tonight”, and she’ll say, “Can I have your 7 ½ minutes?” “NO! I’ll see you tomorrow night” or whenever it was set up for.

Now there are some rules of engagement we need to follow. The first one is - I need to ask for permission because I’m dealing with an equal. So I ask Bonnie for her permission to share what I want to share. The second thing that’s very important is that I need to be in emotional control. Being in emotional control means no crying, no swearing, no yelling, no screaming. I need to be able to logically explain my concerns. It’s okay to get emotional about some things, but I want you to be able to keep the focus, to be an effective communicator.

I teach some business courses on effective communication, and I say to these business people, “If you want to be an effective communicator, you must keep the focus on the message, because anything you do to detract the focus from the message is going to make you less effective as a communicator.” Now, what if I’m a boss, and I talk to my employees like this, “For crying out loud!! How many times do I have to tell you that we can’t be doing this kind of thing?! We’re ruining our bottom line!” Tell me where the focus is. Is it on the message or is it on, “Oh, there he is having a cow. Looks like a Jersey this time”? I mean, we’re seeing him out of control emotionally. He has just shot himself in the foot as an effective communicator because he’s taken the focus off the message and put it on his own state of emotional loss of control. The same is true if someone is crying. Is the focus on the message? No, it’s on the fact that, this person, male or female, is out of control. That’s an ineffective form of communication.

Now, ask yourself two questions – “Is the criticism part of my stewardship, part of my business?”, “Just because I have a critical thought, is it really necessary, is my thought necessary?”. If I have an unnecessary thought, maybe I need to learn to control that. Just because it’s true does not justify my saying it. I need to have something that’s not only true but something that’s necessary. That’s a higher law and a higher principle.

After having answered those two questions to myself and deciding that I do need to go ahead. And then having asked permission from Bonnie and receiving permission from her, I then need to be alone with her. If I’m going to criticise Bonnie, or ladies, if you’re going to criticise your husband in front of the children, tell me where the focus is going to be? It will be on your message, or on the sense of belittlement - on the sense of embarrassment that you will feel because you’re in the

presence of someone else, even if they're little children. We need to be alone with the person with whom we're going to be critical and have their permission so the focus can be on the message. We then need to be in emotional control (which we've already talked about), and this takes practice, but it works out really well and I know it can be done. Bonnie does it. She can sit down and she can say to me, even things that she can feel very emotional about - "Here's a concern that I have". Learn to explain your concern.

Now one of the great challenges is that we need to learn to separate our ego from an issue. Now that's a difficult thing - that's not easy to do, because we tend to integrate that information and always apply it to ourselves. "All information applies to me", but it doesn't! Can I talk about a issue independent of your sense of worth or your sense of value? Can we do that? Will you allow me to do that?

Bonnie has a great skill with that. I remember as a young married man, my mother picked up after me. I was an only child. I left the clothes and stuff all over the place and Mum would just run around and pick up after me. I was such a wonderful child that she would just do that. When I got married I assumed that my wife would pick up where my mother left off. Boy, was that a joke! Bonnie is the oldest of eight children. You take care of yourself. We don't have any slave labor.

So about three weeks into the marriage she came up to me and she says, "Honey, I've got something I need to share with you". That's just how she approached it. I had my stockings rolled up and I'd been practising bouncing them off the wall and into the closet. Kind of a basketball thing, actually. I didn't always make it, but it didn't matter because Mum or my wife would pick them up, right? Boy, that was a mistake! Anyway, I was standing there with my stockings in my hand and I'm ready to pitch them and she's blocking my shot, so I think she just wants to play. She says "Honey, I want to talk to you about that." "This? What is there to talk about?" She says, "I bought a hamper today and it would really mean a lot to me if you would put your stockings and your dirty clothes in the hamper. It just would mean a lot to me if you would do that".

Now she managed to separate my sense of worth from the issue and talk about the issue separately from my worth. Let's try it the other way where she's talking about my worth. "Of all the filthy habits I've ever seen! If you think I'm going to be your mother and pick up after you, why you've got another think coming, I can tell you that! You pick up after yourself!"

"Oh yeah? Well there's a few things I want to tell you about!" You see what happens?, How you approach a person, and especially a male, is going to determine their response. Remember if you approach a male in an attack mode you will get flight or fight. If you want to get them to the nurturing and caring part of themselves they have to go through the logical part.

Now we talked about three stages. Abstinence, Containment, which is the 15 minutes, and then the Permission phase which is "I have something critical to share - is this a good time to do it?". I have found that we need to work through these phases to develop the skills, because most of us have been raised in a renegade environment where we just say whatever comes to our mind whenever we're frustrated. So this is skill development. Gotman says that relationships fail because people lack willingness and the skills or the knowledge. Well, what if its just a simple matter of developing these skills that will help us resolve our conflicts in healthier ways? Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing to be able to do?

We need to stay focused on the particular issue or behavior. Do not attack self-worth, separate the issue from their self-esteem or from their sense of worth, and then the next step is a very important step. It is: Affirm their worth to you.

Now let's say for a moment that I was a boss and I called in a young woman employee and said something like this: "I've got a concern, I need to visit with you about it and it does affect your employment. I can talk to you now or I can talk to you before you go home." Well, most of us would say, "I'd like for you to talk to me now." However with my children - half would say "Talk to me now", the other half would say, "Hold that thought, Dad. You can talk to me later."

Let's say this employee says, "Well, why don't you talk to me now if it's that important?" Well I've asked for permission, I'm alone with her and I say this: "We have had several complaints about you coming in late every day this week and it's kind of a concern because it seem like we have a tolerance policy for you to be late, but not for others to be late. I'm concerned about that. Maybe you could let me know what the story is here?" And the woman responds and says, "Well, my child has been very sick this week and the babysitter that I normally have watch the child can't do it so I have to drive an extra 20 minutes to my mother's who is taking care of the child and I get caught on the freeway, so I've been about 20 minutes late every day. But I stay back 20 minutes every day to make up for it." I would still have a legitimate criticism to say, "You should have communicated that to me so I am not caught in the embarrassing circumstances of not knowing how to respond. I am more than willing to work with that, but I want you to know that that is an issue of you letting me know if your schedule changes. I think you owe that to me as the boss. Even though I understand the circumstances, I want you to get with me if there is a change in your schedule." Now that would be a legitimate criticism?

Well now, here is what it means to affirm their worth. For the next 20 minutes the adrenalin in that young woman's mind is going to be spinning around and she is going to feel unappreciated and not valued and she is going to feel misunderstood. So here's what we need to do. Let's say 10 minutes before its time to go home I say, "Could you come in here for a minute? This is not critical. I just need to bounce something off you. I just want you to know how much I appreciate all that you do around here. I've seen you empty the waste baskets. You're not hired to do that. I've seen you volunteer for extra tasks and extra jobs that need to be done and you have had a great attitude. I just want you to know that I appreciate you as an employee and I hope that you will take that into consideration as you think about what I said earlier today, because I really do value all that you do here." Now tell me what is that going to do for that woman when she goes home tonight? She is going to think about loyalty and she is going to say, "You know, I like that boss." Now that's a true story and that woman was offered more money to go to another job, but she would not take it because she said "I like my boss and I like my work environment." There are other reasons why people will stay at work other than just the dollar.

So affirming their worth is a great principle that we could all learn. Now what happens if we have this session with each other, this 15 minutes of red hour that we talked about and we go through all of these steps and we have the interaction, but then later I come to Bonnie or Bonnie comes to me and says, "Honey, I just want to let you know I really love you. I appreciate that you get up every day and swim crocodile infested waters and go out and slay alligators. I appreciate that." Somehow that's going to give a little balance - that I am important. And yes we are talking about an issue, but it is a skill to separate ego from issue.

The art of receiving criticism is that very issue. The ability to separate what is being said so you actually actively listen to what is being said, so that you can evaluate it, so you can measure it.

There is a question I like to ask people. This is a very, very important question. The question is this: "If I have something critical to say to you, but I believe it will either make you a better person or this a better relationship, how would you like me to approach you? How would you like to receive the criticism?" So I give the person the responsibility of letting me know whether I am a boss or an equal or whatever. It's now not my responsibility alone to figure out how to approach this

individual. What we're talking about here is "What can I do in my approach to you. Give me a way to approach you".

Bonnie has said she would appreciate it if I would write it down. She said, "You are so good verbally that you could win an argument even when I am right." I have to admit that that's a gift. She wants me to write it down so she can then look at it, and think about it and not get distracted and she can weigh it out in her mind and get back to me. She either gives me a letter back or gives me a verbal response at the appropriate time that we set up between ourselves. So the art of receiving criticism begins with each of us giving our spouses an appropriate way to approach us. How do you want me to approach you? I challenge each of you to come up with a way that you want to be approached. Now if I respect your boundaries and I give you some criticism using these guidelines and I do it, let's say it in a letter, then you can evaluate it. The art of receiving criticism is stop, look and listen. Sometimes it's helpful to take notes so you can stay focused on the issue and not start defending yourself mentally.

The next step is feed it back without emotion. "So Bonnie, what your saying is it would really mean a lot to you, with your having dinner ready on the table at 6 o'clock, that if my schedule changes that I would call you as soon as I know and not just show up at 7 or 7.30 and all of a sudden we have a cold dinner on our hands and you have been waiting, the kids are screaming and strangling one another and therefore it would mean a lot you." I am going to feed it back to her and tell her what it is she said to me. I may or may not agree but I am going to develop the skill of being able to reflect back to her what she has said. Then I am going take that and think about it. See, I can't think and talk at the same time. I am going to excuse myself from an immediate response to a time and a place and I am going to evaluate the criticism. Is what Bonnie said true? Is it valid? Is it necessary and could we have a better relationship and will I be a better person and will our family function better if I do this? Probably it would. You know, that's a valid point. "Well Bonnie, I am sorry I have done that and I will make a real effort to call you the moment I know my schedule changes."

Now, can we not deal with that? That is the way, rather than go to that place where we explode and just go off. Let's manage it and don't let ourselves fall into the trap. They say 87% of divorces are the direct result of the inability to resolve conflicts in healthy ways. What if we can learn these skills - just the very ones we are talking about here today? If we could learn the art of giving and receiving criticism and be able to do it as an equal with respect one to another, we're going to solve a whole ton of problems.

Now it does not mean that we have learnt all our negotiation skills yet, but it does mean that we will learn. Your responses are going to fall into one of three categories:

I will change.

I disagree and this is why.

I will not change and am either unwilling or unable to do so.

That's how these interactions will conclude. But, what's going to be important here is that we learn to manage the negative in our lives. We can have criticism, but we can't be a hand grenade with the pin pulled. We can't simply just walk around venting all the time, complaining, being negative all the time. That is unattractive. It destroys acceptance, affection, appreciation. It's withdrawal from the emotional bank account.

So I want to challenge you to try the 24 hour challenge. Let's just really try it. Let's see what happens then if you move from that to containment and see if we can implement some of these principles. I promise you that as you do so, you will feel an increase of love.

Thank you very much.