

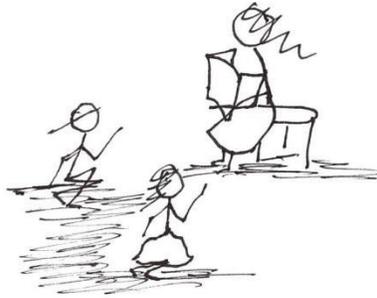
# Relationship Rehab Show

FREE DOWNLOAD: Show #20, October 18, 2022

## Chapter 9: HOW TO TALK WITHOUT FIGHTING

From [Communication Elixirs](#)

And [www.MillionaireMarriageClub.com](http://www.MillionaireMarriageClub.com), MODULE FIVE



Robert Fulgum recently published a 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition of his best seller, *All I Needed to Know I Learned In Kindergarten*. (Seven Million copies sold! Wow!) One of the pithy, practical, no-nonsense pieces of childhood advice I remember from the original was, “Take turns.” And, in just two words, that sums up the essence of a *Skilled Dialogue*.

Many dialogues have two speakers and no listeners. In a *Skilled Dialogue*, two persons take respectful turns. Only one person speaks at a time, eliminating *Disrespectful Communication Tools* and sticking to respectful, “I...” messages rather than the accusatory “you.” When that person is speaking, the other *Listens for the purpose of Understanding*, (Chapter 8) repeating back what was said in his or her own words, emotionally becoming the Speaker in order to truly understand the thoughts, feelings, concerns or desires that are being shared. The two periodically trade roles, the Speaker becoming the Listener, the Listener becoming the Speaker. This “taking turns” continues until both have shared all their thoughts, feelings, concerns and desires and they both feel heard and understood. Simple.

There are a few tips, however, that facilitate the process. And it makes a difference whether you’re in a dialogue with someone who also knows and agrees to this process or you’re conversing with someone who hasn’t read this book and has, perhaps, forgotten the rules from kindergarten. I’ll give you tips for both scenarios, but we’ll begin with two people who agree on this process.

### WHEN TO USE A SKILLED DISCUSSION STRUCTURE

Use this format informally when two persons want to catch up with each other. Speaking and Listening, Listening and Speaking are what two persons who care for each other do when there is news to share. By using the Speaking and Listening skills conversation blocks are eliminated...things like giving unwanted advice, or playing one-ups-man-ship with your stories, or reacting with judgment to the other. Attention to the guidelines of *Speaking to be Heard* and *Listening to Understand* enrich and deepen the exchange.

Also use the Skilled Dialogue format when two persons have an important decision to make that affects them both...or the organization or family in which they’re both involved. The process helps to explore all the options, both personal and

professional (assuming the discussion is about a business decision). The object is to arrive at a decision that works for both parties and works for the group involved.

Use this process when there is a difference of opinion or rift to be resolved. This may be between a husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend, parent/child, boss/employee or friend with friend. In the case of a conflict to be resolved, more tips will be given in the *Love Potions* volume titled *Savory Safeguards*.

These skills and the dialogue process may even be used in a group setting—a family or business meeting.

In all cases, *Listening to Understand* is given as a precious gift that reassures the Speaker of her essential value and meets his need to be heard and understood.

## **GUIDELINES TO A SKILLED DIALOGUE**

The following outline will seem quite structured. It is meant to be. When Jim and I were learning to do this, it was hard to stay within the guidelines. But after replacing our previous discussion breakdowns with several successful sessions, we welcomed the structure. It's a little like putting on a seatbelt and shoulder harness. They are designed to prevent injury. So are these guidelines. If you give it a good try, you'll soon welcome the structure because it facilitates a successful outcome to the discussion, part of which is making sure that both parties are protected from the pain of discussion chaos.

### **DECIDE ON THE TOPIC**

Skilled Dialogues are most effective when confined to only one topic. One of the primary causes of discussion failure is the tendency to tackle too many topics at one time. You may want to discuss where to go on the next family vacation *and* what to do about Johnnie's failing grade in math. In a business meeting you may be airing the pros and cons of a move, or taking on a new product, or what to do about an ineffective employee. Choose the most urgent (or the easiest) but only one topic per *Skilled Dialogue* session. A successful resolution with this topic will build your confidence for the next *Skilled Dialogue* topic.

### **SCHEDULE THE DIALOGUE**

If the topic is important enough to require this process, or you've talked about it before without reaching any solution, make a date for the dialogue. It must be a time when you are both distraction free, reasonably rested, and have a specified length of time to devote to this process. Turn off the TV and cell phones. If there are children, make sure they are asleep or occupied for the length of this date.

### **WHO SPEAKS FIRST?**

Whoever is the most eager to speak may go first, or whoever has the strongest feelings about the topic. Because most of us have poor dialogue habits...things like interrupting or talking over each other...it's helpful for the Speaker to hold an object—any object—(spoon, pen, lipstick tube, etc) that signifies that for the next bit of time, this person is the Speaker and the other is the Listener. When the Listener repeats back what has been shared, he is speaking, but speaking as part of his Listener role so he does *not* hold the object. Indian tribes set a great example for us when they created the tradition of a Talking Stick so that they maintained respectful order in the council meetings. You may call your object, whatever it is, the Talking Stick.

### **START WITH SOMETHING GOOD**

At the beginning of each party's turn to be Speaker, he or she starts with a complimentary or appreciative comment about the other, preferably in regard to the issue to be discussed. If it's a husband and wife about to discuss how to handle a problem with their child, he might begin by saying, "I love how you encouraged Junior about his test results. I know you only want the best for him." When it's her turn to be the Speaker, she might begin with, "Not many fathers

would devote the time that you have to coaching our son's baseball team. I really like the combination of discipline and fun that you bring to their Little League games."

The Listener repeats back, in his/her own words, this positive opening statement before the Speaker continues with whatever else is to be said.

When Jim and I were learning a *Skilled Discussion* process, we didn't know about starting out with a compliment or appreciation. But Jim developed a habit of prefacing any discussion we had about a conflict with these words, "I know we can work this out." Those words caused me to immediately relax—to drop my anxiety about being in conflict with each other and remember how many times we had successfully worked out problems.

The "start with something good" step taken from *Mastering the Mysteries of Love*, accomplishes the same thing. It reminds both parties that there is a foundation of good in the relationship upon which to build. It relaxes the atmosphere.

Tip: DO NOT start your next sentence with "but." "But..." tends to negate whatever good was expressed. Just go on to speak your thoughts, feelings, concerns or desires about the chosen topic.

### **AND THEN?**

The Speaker, using respectful language and tone of voice, shares what is uppermost on her mind. Keep the bites of communication small enough or pause frequently so that the Listener can track what you're saying and remember the gist of it to repeat back. The Speaker speaks. The Listener *Listens to Understand*. The Listener pays attention to body language, facial expression and tone of voice...all the ways we derive information about a person's emotions besides the actual words that are said. The Listener may, in his own words, reflect back the emotion he sees as well as the meaning of the words. The Speaker keeps in mind the five areas of the *Expression Diagram* (Chapter 3) and shares not only her thoughts (opinions, ideas, interpretations of events) but also how she feels, as well as her concerns and desires. Not all levels may come out during her first turn at being the Speaker. Why?

### **TAKE TURNS**

The Speaker may have shared all she needed to for the moment and is ready to hand the Talking Stick over to the Listener, trading roles. Now the Listener holds the talking stick and becomes the Speaker. The original Speaker now *Listens to Understand*.

Sometimes the Listener is either flooded with feelings or ideas to the point that he can't devote his full attention to Listening. In that case the Listener asks to become the Speaker, but only after completely repeating back the last message sent by the Speaker.

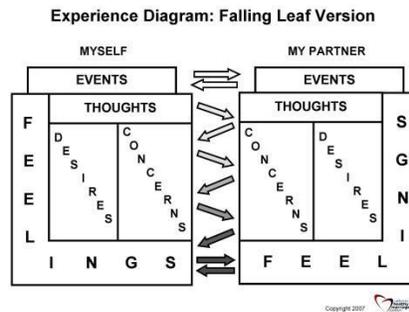
With a little practice, a rhythm is developed between this Speaker and this Listener. It is not the same for everyone who participates in a *Skilled Dialogue*. Some are more comfortable trading places frequently as each covers some aspect of the *Experience Diagram*. Others prefer to take longer turns. The length of a turn doesn't matter as long as both get to *Speak* and each *Listens to Understand*.

### **THE FALLING LEAF EFFECT**

As each speaks and is nonjudgmentally and empathically heard, the level of communication deepens. Feelings, Concerns or Desires that may have been on the surface, give way to deeper Feelings, Concerns or Desires that are more core to the issue. Surface Feelings such as "I want to go to the Bahamas for our vacation" may be peeled back to reveal the deeper

Desire which is “What I *really* want is to take a vacation where we both have fun and enjoy being together *and* there are no big bills to pay when we return.”

Surface Thoughts, Feelings, Concerns and Desires are rarely the most important or crucial to the happiness of the Speaker. It’s the process of being safely, non-judgmentally heard and understood that makes it possible for the Speaker to share deeper and more vulnerably. As each takes a turn at being the Speaker, and both Listen with empathy, the conversation deepens as is illustrated in this image. (Used with permission.)



### FOR EXAMPLE

My friend Andrea is not entirely happy working in her present job. She’s a licensed clinical social worker, currently working with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) victims in a large mental health facility. When airing her thoughts with me, these feelings were shared: Surface feelings of *gratitude* that she has a job, acknowledgement that she is *skillful* and her co-workers *respect* her and refer difficult cases to her, *frustration* with the system that sometimes seems to work against helping victims get well, and *longing* for a more flexible environment with better pay.

As I listened, more ambivalent feelings were shared (the bottom left corner of the *Experience Diagram*). She feels *effective* and *competent* where she is and she’d *regret* leaving some of her clients. One potential opportunity on the table would mean she’d work in an environment where she is *not comfortable* under a director she *doesn’t* completely *trust*. Another opportunity would mean moving to an entirely different area. She’s *overwhelmed* to have to start over with housing, medical referrals and friends...even finding different markets. But the location sounds *appealing*...and brings up feelings of *adventurousness*. In spite of being *excited* about the increase in pay, the job itself has major drawbacks, so she is *reluctant* to commit to it.

As I continued to listen, she expressed more vulnerable feelings. She is in her early forties, unmarried. She often feels *resentment* about needing to manage her life without any help. She sometimes feels *lonely* and *longs* for a partner. She’s also deeply spiritual, and finally concluded that she will *trust* in God, her Higher Power, the Universe, to open up the best opportunities for her when the time is right. Meanwhile she continues to look at her options and is *expecting* a change for the better to come her way.

The previous example used only one Speaker and one Listener. As the Listener listened with empathy, the Speaker moved into deeper levels of Feelings, Concerns and Desires. Next is an example where two persons take turns in the Speaker and Listener roles.

### SUMMARY

1. Decide on only *one* topic to be discussed in this Skilled Discussion.
2. The person most eager begins as the Speaker.
3. The Speaker holds a Talking Stick (any object).
4. Speaker begins by sharing something good about the Listener in regard to this topic.

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5. The Listener repeats back the thoughts, feelings, concerns and desires with the intention to fully understand the perspective of the Speaker.
  6. Speaker and Listener take turns, developing a rhythm or pace that works for them.
  7. Notice the *Falling Leaf Effect*.
  8. Discussion is complete when both parties have shared from all sections of the *Experience Diagram* and both feel heard and understood.
  9. If action is required, agree on a plan with specific assignments of who, what, when, and where.
  10. Choose a date to review and tweak the solution or decision until both parties are satisfied.

**PUTTING THIS SKILL INTO ACTION:**

With whom would you like to practice a Skilled Discussion? \_\_\_\_\_

What do you want the topic to be? \_\_\_\_\_

Please have the SUMMARY steps in front of you when you practice this skill. This structure is so different than the way most of us conduct a conversation that it is necessary to make sure you follow the directions of each step.

What was your experience with the Skilled Discussion? \_\_\_\_\_

What is it like to be the Listener whose only job is to repeat back what is said? \_\_\_\_\_

How did it feel to have the Listener listen so carefully to you and repeat back what you said? \_\_\_\_\_

When learning this skill, try to stick to low-conflict issues. If one of you gets triggered with hurt or anger, set the discussion aside until feelings have calmed down...then come back to it.

Wishing you the best as you experience the magic of this level of communication!



PS: This skill is thoroughly demonstrated in MODULE FIVE of the [Millionaire Marriage Club.com](http://www.MillionaireMarriageClub.com).