



the lifeboat in your brain

BY CHRIS COURSEY
A LIFE MODEL WORKS EBOOK

The Lifeboat in Your Brain

19 Relational Skills that
revolutionize your life,
revitalize your marriage
and reshape the world

By Chris Coursey

About the Author

Chris Coursey is Director of Life Model Works, co-developer of of Thrive and co-author of Joy Starts Here! The Transformation Zone. He focuses on teaching brain based relational skills in workshops, retreats and counseling. He is living proof of the lessons they teach. After overcoming years of struggling with fear and addiction, Chris has become an advocate for spreading joy.

Introduction

Imagine you are on a ship at sea when, suddenly, piercing sirens jolt you. A blaring voice over the loud speaker announces there is an emergency. Directions ensue: Passengers must quickly reach the deck for a life-saving exit strategy. Lifeboats are available to save you from the demise of the damaged vessel. Would you want a lifeboat?

Our Internal Lifeboats

Each of us has a lifeboat between our ears. The human brain is a three-pound, magnificent work of art that directs everything we say, think and do. In all its grandeur the brain dictates our decisions, runs relationships, and produces personal preferences.

When trained, the brain is a God-given instrument to sustain relationships, improve marriages, further friendships and create churches. Our brain is a personal lifeboat that works best with joyful relationships. This efficient little lifeboat relies on learned relational skills that enable us to respond to moment-by-moment circumstances in the best possible manner.

Nineteen Relational Brain Skills

Life Model Works has identified nineteen relational brain skills that must be learned for optimal relational, personal, emotional, spiritual and mental health. Every one of us, ideally, develops these skills by the time we reach 3 years old. When the nineteen are not

fully mastered, we experience difficulties. We end up feeling empty, a shell of who we wanted to be.

Acquiring the Nineteen Skills

There is hope. The lifeboat between our ears can transform us to a confident, brilliant cruiser that sails the high relational seas with efficiency, style and grace. Young or old, we can train our brain to learn the nineteen skills. Whether we need a tune up or a makeover, there is no better time to start than today. Relational brain skills may be the best investment we can make in our lifetime.

The process of learning nineteen skills takes human interaction and time. The nineteen form a resilient identity that gracefully endures under stress, fatigue and pain. We start to see joyful character that shines and suffers well during strain and distress. Without these essential skills, something is missing in our lives.

Practicing Nineteen Skills

I met a man in an airport who was missing something. The problem for him was he lacked the answer. His escalating emotions were spilling out, and spreading toxic material to innocent bystanders. I share this story in the new book, *Joy Starts Here: The Transformation Zone*:

We were standing in line to board an airplane when the announcement was made that our plane was full. Because this was the last flight, I knew we faced an overnight stay. One passenger in line suddenly lost it. In a rage he

threw his bags and spewed profanities. His raging voice echoed in the terminal. Passengers scattered. This guy was no longer in relational mode. As I made my way over to the ticket desk, he walked around the terminal screaming at anyone in uniform. I could see his red face and his intense emotions were scaring people. By this time his eyes were bulging and he was sweating profusely. As he neared the ticket desk, I felt compelled to reach out to him. I knew this man was drowning. He needed some serious help returning to joy so I took a deep breath and walked up to him. For a moment I wondered if he would knock me out.

“You are really having a bad day, aren’t you?” I asked affirmingly. “You are ___ ___ right I am having a bad day!” he fired back. We locked eyes for a few moments then I said, “Well, I am a pastor, a follower of Jesus and I would be honored if I could pray with you.” I was pleasantly relieved when he muttered, “Ok, yeah, sure.” Standing in the middle of the terminal we bowed our heads. I put my hand on his shoulder, we took a moment of quiet (skill two). Then, I invited Immanuel to share our distress and bring some vision (skill thirteen).

I noticed tears running down his face. “You see,” he explained, “I have been traveling for medical help because I was recently diagnosed with serious cancer. This flight cancellation takes away my precious, limited time with my wife and daughters.” For a few moments we shared sadness then he said, “Wait! I have to

do something.” He retraced his steps and apologized to every single airline employee he offended. After several minutes he returned. “I have been feeling like I need to get right with God,” he told me. “I wonder if this whole ordeal is God speaking?” A sparkle of joy appeared in his eyes as his face muscles relaxed. The next morning I saw him boarding the flight with a smile and a brand new Bible under his arm.

Because of my learned relational skills I stayed anchored long enough to toss him a life preserver. He needed a lifeboat in the form of a trained brain who could stay connected with him even in the midst of intense emotions. His right hemisphere required another person, a mirror, to show him the way to Skill 2, Simple Quiet. All of us are taking in water. Some are used to the water while others are ready for change. Which one are you?

Maintaining Joy In Our Lives

Joy is fundamental to the formation and expression of our character. Our character is molded through ongoing interactions with people who either have or lack the nineteen relational skills. Joy is the foundation to learn new brain skills that transform our relationships.

Those of us who have the nineteen skills do not realize or remember how we gained the skills. Simply, the skills are similar to driving a car. We don't think about it. For this reason it is easy to misunderstand why everyone else is not the same. We may even assume people lack motivation, faith and will power.

Learning the Nineteen Skills

Thanks to brain plasticity, experience reorganizes neural pathways in the brain. Experience, particularly joyful interactions with people who have the skills, propel us in mastering skills. For too long nineteen skills have flown under the radar. There was no language, much less a training format to learn new skills. At Life Model Works we now have the language and training structure. All we need is you.

In this Ebook, we'll review each of the nineteen relational skills.

Skill One - *Share Joy*

Facial expressions and voice tones amplify, “We’re glad to be together!”

Signs of Joy

- Facial expressions.
- Change in body language.
- Positive verbal communication.
- Positive emotions.
- Positive physical responses (increased heart rate, dilated pupils).

Relational joy is:

- Contagious.
- A non-verbal expression that escalates with physical cues including eye contact and smiling.
- Reinforced by positive verbal communication.
- Grows into an emotional state when it is shared between two people.

Technically nonverbal expressions of joy are described as right-hemisphere-to-right-hemisphere communication which amplifies our most desired positive emotional state. Relational joy is best conveyed face-to-face but voice tone is a close second.

We develop a strong bond with people who light up to see us. Skill One makes life, church, marriage, business and everything else better. Ideally we return to joy from every unpleasant state the brain knows.

We don't spend much time thinking about joy until something happens. Our joy levels are either profoundly low or highly elevated.

Creating Joy

- Dopamine is released when we experience joy. This leads to satisfaction, empowerment and motivation. Ideally joy leads to rest then serotonin recharges us for more joy.
- If joy levels sink, our brains turn to BEEPS. BEEPS is an acronym for Behaviors, Experiences, Events, People and Substances that hijack the brain. BEEPS artificially regulates our feelings.

A loss of joy leads to:

- Anger
- Disgust
- Silence
- Broken relationships

Our families substitute joy with activities, sports, movies, television, computers, busyness and endless distractions. This pseudo joy leaves us empty.

A loss of joy among individuals leads to a loss of joy within a community. Churches become rigid and rule-based. Parents focus on behavior. Culture links joy with sex, shame, fear and skepticism. Without Skill One we risk passing on the very patterns we despise.

As we remember, the creation, expression and sharing of joy defines our personality. "Why are you so happy?" people wonder. The fun does not stop here. Joy has counterpart called Skill Two.

Skill Two - Soothe Myself

Simple Quiet - Quieting (shalom) after both joyful and upsetting emotions is the strongest predictor of life-long mental health.

Can you identify a time in your life when you were wrought with worry and dread? Your shallow breathing and tense body gripped you. When Skill Two is missing we do not effectively quiet our thoughts or body.

Skill Two Characteristics

- A primary commodity that keeps relationships balanced.
- Releases serotonin on an "as needed" basis to recharge our relational battery.
- Follows Skill One to soothe our body and calm our mind.

Relationships require a rhythm of joy and rest. When it comes to relational skills, every generation can only transmit what they learn and use. As skills drop out, generations spread undesirable traits.

The absence of Skill Two causes:

- Depression
- Fatigue
- Anxiety
- Addictions
- ADHD/ADD
- Behavioral issues
- Personality disorders

Skill Two is difficult to identify because replacement patterns are socially acceptable. We replace quiet and rest with BEEPS in the form of:

- Busyness
- Work
- Sex
- Possessions
- Food

Synthetically calming our emotions and ignoring rest signals create strain and dysregulates the brain. BEEPS replace the natural ebb and flow families rely on. We pass this deformity on and call it normal.

Signs that rest is needed:

- Little to no eye contact
- Extreme energy levels (low or high)
- Feeling of being overwhelmed
- Tension with others
- Exhaustion

Methods to Practice Resting

- Yoga
- Silent retreats
- The Sabbath
- Exercise that calms the mind

Skill Two is best learned by spending time with people who rest. Like all of the nineteen skills, Skill Two is relationally transmitted. Over time, quieting begins to replace previously learned behaviors that replaced a genuine need for rest.

Rest is a gift we give other people. As we demonstrate this skill we become experts at recognizing the need for rest. We allow others the

freedom to rest. Rest is one of the most productive skills we can practice.

Skill Three - *Form Bonds for Two*

Synchronize Attachments - We can share a mutual state of mind that brings us closer and lets us move independently as well. We are both satisfied.

With Skill Three we feel safe and secure. We are free to be ourselves because the world is a safe place. We are no longer restrained by fear or the compulsion to conceal what we feel. Skill Three prepares us to engage the world with confidence, resilience, resourcefulness and creativity.

Characteristics of Skill Three

- Sharing and respecting another's signals and limitations.
- Expressing feels, thought and words equally.
- Allowing another person to experience personal space.

Results of Practicing Skill Three

- The formation of a "mutual mind".
- The feeling you are connected, understood and valued.
- The development of deep bonds with others.
- A true sense of security.

Consequences of Failing to Establish Skill Three

- A loss of identity
- Lack of security
- Pain
- Isolation
- Rejection
- Grudges, fear, resentment disconnectedness and self-centeredness

- Selfishness
- BEEPS become our reality.
- Need to compete with others.

Skill Three is one of the more underestimated nineteen brain skills. From the onset of life, Skill Three glues us to the person who loves, feeds, comforts, and protects us. Our identity expands with the introduction of each new joyful relationship. Attunement, recovery and face to face interaction with others builds our character, heals our wounds and increases our maturity. Skill Three, a bond between two people, provides the ideal foundation to learn the nineteen brain skills.

Skill Four - *Create Appreciation*

Healthy minds are full of appreciation. Appreciation creates belonging and changes stress to contentment.

What are you thankful for today? What makes you smile? Pause for a moment, and reflect on something you appreciate. What do you notice?

Appreciation is:

- Joy
- A gift we share with others.
- Created from unexpected acts of kindness.
- Born out of fond memories with loved ones.

Appreciation, when shared, activates our relational circuits, resettles our nervous system and releases a cocktail of bonding hormones so we feel connected and peaceful. The student of Scripture will discover frequent reminders to remember, appreciate, enjoy and meditate on the good stuff.

Appreciation results in:

- Positive emotions (strength, security)
- Positive emotions within others
- A sense of belonging

People who feel no appreciation:

- Spread pain, distrust, anger and bitterness
- Expect the worst case scenario
- Feel rejection, depression and despair
- Fail to forgive others

Skill Four brings us together. When we create rejection, lovers, family, peers and strangers become commodities instead of comrades. When the non-relational parts of our brain run our relationship, trust erodes. The presence of Skill Four is a game-changer for relationships, a direct reflection of what a healthy and stable marriage, family and community looks like. When appreciation levels run low bitterness springs up.

Bobby's Story

Bobby spent much of his time at work isolated at his desk. All around him people busily and joyfully interacted with each other, but they did not include him. Without realizing it, Bobby's body language was pushing people away. He often appeared defensive and frustrated. His coworkers sensed something was wrong in Bobby but they respected his nonverbal signals that screamed, "Leave me alone! Quit talking! Get out of here!" People gave him space.

One day Bobby turned to a coworker and asked, "Why doesn't anyone talk to me? Everyone seems to interact, but they ignore me. What did I do wrong?" The coworker replied, "Bobby, to be honest, you give off signals that tell us you want to be left alone. You slam drawers. You grunt in frustration. You give us dirty looks. Your body language tells us to leave you alone, so we do." Bobby was surprised by his coworkers words but he decided to practice creating appreciation. Bobby began to reach out to his coworkers. "You look nice today Helen!" "Hey Curt, nice job on the project last week!" "Betty, I'm grabbing a cup of coffee, can I get you one?" Soon Bobby was fully engaged with his coworkers, interacting and

building joy. Appreciation provided the opportunity for meaningful heart to heart connections.

Appreciation is a Learned Behavior

Being around people who use Skill Four provides a clear example of what appreciation looks and feels like. We enjoy interacting with individuals and groups who are well-versed in appreciation skills. With practice and effort, appreciation becomes effortless.

Appreciation is Worth the Effort

Appreciation keeps us focused on what is important to keep us free from regrets and guilt. We restore appreciation when we ask, "What am I thankful for today?" We share appreciation when we express our appreciation. Start and end your day with appreciation and you will notice more energy, a more positive outlook and an increase in stamina to navigate hardship. Your health and relationships will thank you.

Skill Five - *Form Family Bonds*

Bonds For Three - Family bonds let us share the joy built by the people we love.

Family bonds provide freedom to grow and explore the world. With this new skill we discover there is more than enough joy to go around. Thanks to Skill Three, the foundation for a house has been established. We are ready for a new surge in joy with our primary caregiver, mom, who sets the tone for joyful interaction with dad.

Stages of Family Bonding

- **Newborn:** Baby focuses on mom to build a secure bond
- **6 Months:** Baby begins to take interest in dad. This transition is successful if mom is present.
- **7 Months – 3 Years:** Babies and toddlers identify themselves as part of a family. Two becomes three and this family bond will shape their lives.
- **12 Years:** Children shift from family to community. They are more focused on a group identity than individual identity.

Tina's Story

Tina grew up in a tense home where she feared her mother's anger. Mom's anger kept everyone on edge and this painful disconnect left her feeling alone and overwhelmed much of the time. She did not fully understand how to relate to her father who was physically present but emotionally absent. As a teenager, Tina found relationships confusing and unpredictable. As long as she had a good friend to

interact with, she felt safe but once other people joined the interaction, Tina became guarded, jealous and envious. Watching her friend interact with other people caused Tina to feel hurt and rejected. Group interaction was threatening.

As Tina began to look at her fear she realized a childhood pattern was at work and she wanted help. With the encouragement of a trusted church friend, Tina joined a women's group. At first this step was frightening, but over time Tina started to learn how rewarding group interactions could be. Joy levels increased. Tina began to make more friends and spend time with them in groups. For the first time Tina was excited for group interactions.

The prerequisite for a joyful, secure Skill Five is a stable Skill Three. While there is a significant learning curve, we learn from one relationship how to interact and grow into the next. Early life patterns shape how well family bonds form. What we learn in grade school prepares us for high school which prepares us for college, and so on. The same progression holds true for Skill Five. Will rejection or belonging set the tone for our interactions?

Results of Poor Skill Five Development

- We feel alone at work, church and within group settings.
- We feel threatened to relate with more than one person.
- We may be guarded during gatherings and parties.
- Fear of rejection and anxiety may surface when we interact with other people.

- Computers, television, books and video games feel safer.
- Having one friend feels better than two or three.

Insecure bonds, divorce, death, broken families and early life experiences can scar our confidence and hinder our ability to develop Skill Five. Every child requires joyful three-way bonds between a mother and father.

Correcting Poor Skill Five Development

- Spiritual family and the surrounding community can help us pick up the pieces for restoration.
- We can grow, nurture and develop a secure attachment with one other person (Skill Three) that provides strength and confidence to explore and strengthen a group bond.
- We can be delightfully surprised to discover how the addition of people into our network grows rather than drains joy.

Healing pain from disrupted bonds is not always easy but it happens when we turn to Immanuel (Skill Thirteen) for guidance and resolution. Processing painful events enables us to grow more joy, disarm fears and advance forward to connect with other people with confidence. We can join small groups, churches, sport teams, clubs, and organizations. These avenues become fertile ground to discover new ways to be ourselves in a group setting.

Skill Six - *Identify Heart Values from Suffering*

The Main Pain and Characteristic of Hearts: Caring deeply can mean hurting deeply. Our deepest hurts hide our greatest treasures.

Characteristics of Pain

- Pain demands our attention.
- Left unchecked, pain steals our most valuable resources.
- When pain goes unprocessed we learn to hide, mask and run from pain.
- Unless the relational parts of our brain actively shift this response, we avoid pain, even when the threat of pain is long gone.
- Pain that is not fully processed stays with us the rest of our lives.

The beauty of Skill Six is what it conveys: There is more going on than the pain we feel. Pain does not need to have the final word.

The Purpose of Pain

- Healing gains considerable traction as we find meaning in our hurts then begin to create a coherent narrative of our experience.
- Looking at lifelong patterns to help identify the core values for each person's unique identity.
- Helps us recognize our heart values and embrace the gifts God has uniquely given each of us to reflect aspects of His character.

Why We Fail to Learn from Pain

- We cannot imagine there is something of value beneath our responses of what hurts us.
- We live in a culture that pervasively floods us with cheap solutions. When we hurt physically, we take aspirin. When emotionally or mentally damaged, we disconnect and turn to a variety of BEEPS.
- We refuse to believe pain serves a purpose.

We may not realize or embrace the point that God has brilliantly created each one of us uniquely in His image. Our identity is that precious treasure buried beneath painful experiences that distort and rob who God created us to be. What would change if we started to look into the mirror that God provides? One that connects the dots of our wounds to a God-given set of values crafted into our DNA?

How to Learn from Pain

- Identify life-long patterns, moments where we experienced something that bothered us.
- Highlight sources of distress then prayerfully consider what our reactions say about us. What kind of person would be bothered by this? Why?
- Consider the non-negotiables that fuel, motivate and fire us up. What makes us zealous?
- Ask people to share what they observe as our main pain (s) and heart qualities. Notice their responses.

Barnabus encouraged, Paul fiercely valued truth, John loved, Jesus forgave, Peter jumped out of boats (passion). While these attributes demonstrate something essential within each person's character

they also reveal qualities that caused pain, distress, even death. What does your pain say about you? How are these attributes expressed? In what ways do these qualities hurt?

Tim's Story

Tim grew up believing something was wrong with him. As a child Tim felt a deep love and sadness for other people, particularly those who have suffered loss and hardship. Tim did not know what to do with these strong feelings but he felt vulnerable, even weak. He noticed how friends seemed to easily dismiss the needs of other people and yet, Tim could not shake the compulsion that he needed to do something in order to help people in need. He started praying.

Over time Tim began to embrace this "weakness" as he called it. Freedom and a newfound peace emerged in Tim's life. He discovered that compassion was a heart value for him, a precious characteristic that was his to share with the world. He no longer needed to fight or resist his gift. The more Tim embraced his need to show others compassion, the greater his peace. While Tim's gift over the years brought him a lot of pain, his gift has richly blessed his life and enriched his closest relationships.

Skill Seven - *Tell Synchronized Stories*

4+ Story Telling – When our minds work together our stories come together.

Stories do more than captivate our listeners. Stories paint a picture how well our brain is functioning. Telling stories is a simple test of how our brain is working and guideline for training the brain.

The Purpose of Four-plus Stories

- Offers a glimpse into the workings of our internal world.
- Demonstrate secure bonds, grow relationships and share key brain skills.
- Show that all four levels of the right-hemispheric control center are working together. When this happens the bonus of our words in the left hemisphere match our experience in the right. Words and nonverbal signals produce a coherent narrative.
- Brings people together, resolves conflicts, propagates brain skills and provides healthy examples of responses.
- Test and train our brain's ability to handle specific aspects of life and relationships.
- Celebrate the special moments that leave our legacy.

Guideline for Four-plus Story Telling

- Make eye contact.
- Share with moderate emotion.
- Four-plus stories are packaged in three formats, Return To Joy (Skill 11), Acting Like

Myself (Skill 12) and Share Immanuel (Skill 13). Each story must illustrate a specific feeling for maximum efficacy.

- Show authentic emotion on your face and in your voice. Rely on feeling words for emotions and body sensations.
- Use stories that you have told before and keep them concise.
- Practice stories over and over.
- Have a four-plus checklist nearby.
- Work up to telling each story in under 2 minutes.

Reasons for a Lack of Four-plus Stories

- Unprocessed trauma.
- Lack of examples.
- Insecure attachments.
- Few *stories of us* during childhood.
- Too consumed with problems.
- Distracted by our own thoughts and feelings.
- Minimal face to face interaction.
- Unaware of automatic bodily functions (breathing, emotions).

Practice Makes Perfect

Without practice it can be difficult to create a narrative using words to describe feelings and body sensations. This step requires activation of the highest regions of the prefrontal cortex, what we identify as Level 4 in the right hemispheric control center. When the control center is working together, what we refer to as "synchronized," the left hemisphere creates coherent narratives with input from the right hemisphere. One of the signs of an insecure attachment is the inability to organize and create coherent stories from our history.

Like any good thing, four-plus stories must be shared with other people. Listeners help us gauge the effectiveness of our stories with suggestions and feedback. We practice, we improve. Four-plus stories weave together our history with the present then prepares us and our listeners for the future.

Eric's Story

Eric needed to work on his marriage. One of the difficulties Eric's wife expressed to him was his inability to communicate, to "share his heart." Eric felt like he was trying hard to be a good provider and a loving husband. Shouldn't his wife just know that he loves her?

After some thought and consultation with his prayer partner, he recognized something was indeed missing. After learning about Skill Seven from his prayer partner, Eric realized his father was "the silent type" and Eric was following his father's example. Along the way Eric developed a deep-rooted assumption that expressing himself was pointless, so why bother? It was time for change.

Eric began to practice four-plus stories with his prayer partner and eventually, his wife. Eric noticed a drastic shift in his marriage. Skill Seven became an avenue for joy as Eric used four-plus stories to highlight events from his day, share special moments from vacations, and convey the qualities he appreciates about his wife and marriage. Skill Seven became a foundational skill that improved Eric's ability to communicate, stay relationally connected and share joy.

Skill Eight - *Identify Maturity Levels*

We need to know where we are, what we missed and where we are going. Without a map we keep falling in the same holes.

Milestones of Maturity

- Identifying our ideal level of maturity so we know if our development is impaired.
- Knowing our general maturity which informs us what the next developmental task will be.
- Recognizing our immediate level of maturity from moment to moment reveals if we have been triggered into reactivity by something that just happened or if we encountered a “hole” in our development that needs remedial attention.
- Watching when our maturity level is slipping tells us when emotional capacity has been drained in us or others.

Scripture mentions six stages that define the developmental roadmap for life:

1. Unborn
2. Infant
3. Child
4. Adult
5. Parent
6. Elder stage

At Life Model Works these six life stages have been carefully sequenced to bring clarity to the process of joyfully growing up.

Questions to Determine Stage of Maturity

- Have you ever responded in a rigid, "childish" way that did not line up with your personal values?
- Do certain people, circumstances or emotions create strong reactions in you?
- Do you or someone you know respond like a small person in a big person's body? Under what conditions?
- Have you noticed times in your life when you or someone you know appeared relationally stunted in growth and development?
- Do you make decisions out of fear?
- Do you need more mature people?
- Do you need healing in specific ways?
- Where in your character do you show weakness?

We may not complete every life stage there is, however, each of us should aim to function at adult maturity. When undeveloped, we risk making decisions out of fear and developing a "pseudo-maturity" where we appear more mature than we really are. With each stage of growth we increase our capacity to care for ourselves and others.

Benefits of Identifying Maturity Level

- We develop wisdom for growth.
- We avoid passing on deformities and malfunctions.
- We correct problems.
- We increase our emotional capacity and build resiliency for life.
- We change unwanted generational patterns.

Characteristics of Skill 8

- Explains why we keep falling into the same holes, often in spite of attempts to do otherwise.
- Offers clear steps for growth and recovery.
- Suggests there is more to personal growth than making better choices, trying harder and having good intentions.
- Fosters a clear understanding of personal and corporate maturity. Provides the framework for what happens when maturity is attained or stunted.
- Offers clarity to develop earned maturity that matches our personal age and stage of life.

Monitoring Maturity

Without a clear understanding and application of Skill Eight we fail to recognize that developmental deficits, if addressed, could have prevented trouble. Weak spots in our maturity and character frequently appear during times of distress and pressure. Without systematic effort to correct weaknesses we risk relational plunges that leave us and others wondering, "What just happened?"

Maturity is Learned from Others

Personal maturity reflects the health and resources of our families and communities. There is a remarkable shortage of mature maps and guides within our communities. The lack of elders with earned maturity as well as missing multigenerational communities leave a gaping hole in the fabric of a family and community.

For the church in general, it is easy to spiritualize maturity and miss the need for emotional maturity. Both are needed. We assume maturity is a natural progression from salvation. Subscribing to these beliefs create resistance to an honest assessment of maturity and create shame for those seeking to identify earned maturity.

Improving Maturity

Similar to the development of a house that starts from the foundation, we search for holes and unfinished tasks beginning with infant maturity.

We improve maturity by:

- Reinforcing needs and tasks with the help of others who already have maturity.
- Removing fears that hinder forward progress.
- Seeking Immanuel's guidance to process traumas. (Skill Thirteen)
- Creating belonging where the weak and strong mix.
- Increasing our joy.

Each step propels us forward. As we fill in gaps we explore next steps at child then adult maturity.

Maturity does not add to our value, rather, maturity enables us to express and share more of ourselves with the people we love.

Skill Nine - *Take A Breather*

Timing When to Disengage – Skillfully take short pauses before people become overwhelmed. We read the non-verbal cues so we can build trust.

Have you ever felt overwhelmed by another person? Verbal and nonverbal warnings signal personal limits are not respected. By the time most people recognize overwhelm cues it is too late.

Results of Ignoring Personal Space Warning Signals

- We lose trust when people disregard or overwhelm signals.
- We avoid people who do not protect us from their intensity.
- We become guarded.
- Teasing, bullying and violence occur when Skill Nine drops out leaving us violated and dishonored.
- Decrease in joy.

Sustained closeness and trust requires us to stop and rest before people become overwhelmed. These short pauses to quiet and recharge take only seconds. The pause keeps interactions safe and joyful. Those who read the nonverbal cues and let others rest are rewarded with trust and love.

Skill Nine is Learned

The most common scenario of a Skill Nine failure is when we failed to learn the skill. When painful events go unprocessed our survival circuit may work too hard and we become more intense. At this point it will be

difficult to regulate what we feel. Bullies and violent offenders have not learned Skill Nine.

Consequences of Never Learning Skill Nine

- We wonder why other people are so distractible, even fussy.
- We turn to Immanuel (Skill Thirteen) and trusted friends (Skill Five) for support.
- We search for signs that we are overwhelmed or overwhelming other people.
- We notice our body responses.
- We invite friends and family to offer suggestions in case we miss important cues.
- We stay open to subtle cues in ourselves and others that were overlooked.
- We practicing noticing moments our relational engine is "in the red" and take some time to quiet.
- We keep our relational circuits on and notice when we relationally go dim in order to quickly return to our ideal state.

Skill Nine prepares us for the more difficult brain skill, Skill Fifteen, Interactive Quiet.

Skill Ten - *Tell Nonverbal Stories*

The nonverbal parts of our stories strengthen relationships, bridge generations and cross cultures.

In conversation, the content we convey is first assessed by *how* we say the words, followed by the words we are speaking. (Hughes & Baylin, 2012)
One UCLA study reported that 93% of effective communication is nonverbal. Using a conglomeration of the limbic system, vagal nerve, anterior insula and more, our body informs us when something is going on. The amygdala, part of the limbic system, what we refer to as Level 2 of the control center (Skill 18), detects a threat in 1/10 of a second. This response is much faster than the time it takes for our brain to create a conscious thought. (Hughes & Baylin, 2012)

Non-verbal communication includes:

- Facial expressions
- Voice tone (prosody)
- Body movements
- Use of personal space

Reading emails, text messages and Facebook postings give us words to read but no emotional content. This absence creates problems. Many misunderstandings have been caused by the lack of voice tone and facial expression.

Non-verbal communication allows us to:

- Express our deepest thoughts, feelings, desires, fears and our most prized memories.

- Share our emotions and express the rich content of our minds through our face and voice.
- Conveys our internal world, keep us grounded, anchor our relationships and create mutual understanding in our interactions.
- Enhance our ability to interpret what we see on someone's face to know whether they are joyful, engaged, bored or up to no good.
- Improve our stories using our face, voice, body language and personal space as part of the story-telling package.

Skill Eleven - *Return to Joy from the Big Six Feelings*

We return to shared joy as we quiet distress. We stay in relationship when things go wrong.

The brain is wired to feel six unpleasant emotions:

1. Fear
2. Anger
3. Sadness
4. Disgust
5. Shame
6. Hopelessness

We need to learn how to quiet each of these different circuits separately while maintaining our relationships.

Consequences of Never Learning Skill 11

- Avoiding, side-tracking and disconnecting from the very emotions our brains are wired to feel.
- Unregulated emotions.
- Usage of non-relational strategies to manage what we feel rather than quieting emotions back to joy.
- Relationships blow out.
- People justify their responses.
- People blame others for their upset and turn to BEEPS for comfort.

Parents who never learn Skill 11 are unable to show children how to properly manage and quiet big feelings.

This leads to a dysfunctional family dynamic:

- Responses, usually anger and "behavior-management" typically shut down children.
- Power-plays intensify.
- Problems soon become bigger than the relationship.
- Friends and family do not resolve conflicts because who is right or wrong stays the focus.
- Rules and tasks steer people and conversations.
- Leaders end up avoiding situations that create specific emotions.

We justify these responses and call them normal. No one considers the brain skill that returns us to joy and glad to be together states. As we look at the relational landscape of our networks we start to see the urgency for Skill Eleven.

Skill Twelve - *Act Like Myself in the Big Six Feelings*

When we find our design we will be life-giving - whether we are upset or joyful.

One crucial step to maintain our relationships when we are upset is learning to act like the same person we were when we had joy to be together. A lack of training or bad examples causes us to damage or withdraw from the relationships we value when we get angry, afraid, sad, disgusted, ashamed or hopeless.

Skill Twelve equips us to live relationally and respond gracefully as we navigate upset, pain, fatigue, distress, misunderstanding and loss. Our emotional brain must learn to feel unpleasant feelings and stay engaged, relational, kind and attentive to the people close to us. Avoiding upset is impossible. The greater question becomes, "How well do I respond when I feel upset?"

We learn that negative emotions do not have the final word. Helpful examples and our shared experiences give the resources to navigate upset. We internalize examples then carry them with us. Skill Twelve connects us together as we express the best of ourselves and repair as necessary when things go wrong.

Skill Thirteen - *See What God Sees:* *Heartsight*

Seeing people and events from God's perspective yields a life filled with hope and direction.

Hope and direction come from seeing situations, ourselves and others the way they were meant to be. This spiritual vision guides our training and restoration. Through our hearts we see the spiritual vision God sees.

Characteristics of Skill 13

- We discover God sees more to a person and situation than our limited vision allows.
- We are reminded that God is with us, even when fears and feelings say otherwise.
- We look to God for clarity and comfort.
- We are reminded the beggar on the street has a story, our persecutors need forgiveness and humanity longs for love.
- We insert perspective and restore our peace during strain and hardship.

Skill Thirteen works for moments of upset but should be used as a lifestyle. Heart vision guides our faith and restores our relationships.

Skill Fourteen - *Stop The Sark*

This Greek work (also rendered sarx) refers to seeing life according to our view of who people are and how things should be. This conviction, that I know or can determine the right thing to do or be, is the opposite of heartsight. (Skill Thirteen)

Characteristics of Sark People

- Sarks become the sum of their mistakes.
- They blame others for their unhappiness.
- They accuse people for their misfortune.
- They gossip about others.
- They resent others.
- They justify their behavior.
- They are self-righteousness.
- Treat others according to their appearance, mistakes and reputation.
- Assume others treat them according to their own mistakes.

Skill Fourteen is a fundamental skill to establish interactions where people feel seen and valued. We think before we speak and we see some of what God sees. False "Godsight" leads to all these undesirable traits. The sark requires active opposition.

A Sark's behavior causes:

- Frustration in others
- Tension among others with equal abilities.
- A feeling we are forced to behave a certain way.
- People to feel inadequate and ignored.
- A feeling there is no attunement or peace in the strategy.

- Negative emotions particularly when Scripture is used to bring death, not life.

One of the wisest men to walk the earth said, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven; a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance..." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4, NKJV) How can we tell what time it is? Stopping the Sark starts with turning to God for guidance.

There are two kinds of knowing:

1. Synchronization with God and His Spirit. This attunement brings wisdom, peace and clarity.
2. Knowing what seems right but in the end does not bring life.

Skill Fifteen - *Quiet Interactively*

Skilled reading of facial cues allows us to operate at high energy levels and manage our drives without hurting ourselves or others.

Using the ventromedial cortex that is part of Level 4 of the Control Center together with the intelligent branch of the parasympathetic nervous system allows us to control the upper end of arousal states. Instead of taking us all the way to quiet/peace, this type of quieting allows us to operate at high levels of energy and quiet just enough to avoid going into overwhelm.

Characteristics of Skill 15

- Prevents violent and aggressive tendencies.
- Slows down sexual and predatory urges.
- Helps us control our emotions (fear, excitement).
- Oversees real time updates and predicts negative outcome by observing people's behaviors.

Based on early life experiences, particularly with the father between 12 and 18 months, we learn to regulate fear and control the two types of aggression, "hot" and "cold" responses. Interactive quieting training helps us resist acting on impulses (hot) or premeditating revenge (cold).

Developing Skill 15

During THRIVE Training carefully designed exercises are crafted to effectively train Skill Fifteen. These training exercises are both impactful and delicately

balanced so people practice the skill in a safe environment. Caution must be exercised, our most painful experiences arise from moments people lack this skill.

While experience and genes play a role, we see some of the more severe personality disorders develop when Skill Fifteen fails in the developmental process, from borderline issues, disorganized attachments, sociopathic and violent personalities and more. Skill Fifteen is a trainable skill that must be trained when people have the skill and practice under careful conditions.

Skill Sixteen - *Recognize High and Low Energy Response: Sympathetic and Parasympathetic*

Some people are at their best with activity and others with solitude. Knowing our styles and needs brings out the best in all our interactions.

Sympathetic Systems create:

- Joy
- Anger
- Fear
- Other energy-producing emotions.

Parasympathetic Systems create:

- Sadness
- Disgust
- Shame
- Hopelessness
- Reduced energy levels

Characteristics of Parasympathetic People

- Respond with self-deprecating attacks on themselves.
- Deny they matter or have any intrinsic value.
- Feel like door mats.
- Feel hopeless about life and relationships.
- Experience sadness as a more common emotion compared with anger or fear.

Characteristics of Sympathetic People

- React to fear and shame with arousal and anger.
- Avoid these emotions by shaping the responses of other people through their anger, control or punitive responses.

- Create fear if one must work under or correct someone who runs their relationships.
- Prefer hot emotions and avoid energy-draining emotions.

Accepting Differences between Sympathetic and Parasympathetic People

- Correct unwanted patterns starts with Skill Sixteen, which provides mutual understanding for our God-given differences.
- Extend grace through the delightful discovery that we are uniquely created.
- Become mindful that people are wired for high-energy activities in the form of worship, exercise, music, play, extreme sports and hobbies, while others seek low-energy activities.

Looking at these differences brings Skill Sixteen to the forefront of our minds and relationships. It leads to acceptance and mutual satisfaction. With Skill Sixteen we identify these distinctions and respond with appreciation for what sustains equilibrium and creates order for couples, families, churches, classrooms and the workplace.

Skill Seventeen - *Identify Attachment Styles*

Our lives and reality need to be organized around secure love. Fears, hurts and emotional distance create insecure relational styles that will last for life unless we replace them.

Characteristics of Secure Attachments

- Bring joy
- Peace
- Resilience
- Flexibility as we mature.

Characteristics of Insecure Attachments

- An under-active attachment pattern (dismissive) leading to underestimating the importance of feelings and relationships.
- The thought that things are fine and no big deal.
- An overactive attachment style (distracted) leading to excessive intensity and an exaggeration of feelings, hurts and needs.
- Feelings of hurt or thinking others are upset when they are not.
- Fear of getting close to the people they love and need.

Results of Practicing Skill Seventeen

- Builds joyful bonds and corrects bonds of fear.
- People respond to our weaknesses with tenderness so we grow.
- Relationships develop security with careful attunement, validation, comfort and responsive timing to needs so we feel seen and satisfied.

- Corrects unwanted, addictive behaviors with a new-found joy and peace.

Life and relationships are deeply rewarding when our attachments are secure and synchronized. We begin to recognize urges and fears that drive our thoughts, decisions and relationships. We go to the source of our deepest cravings that drive our BEEPS.

Skill Eighteen - Intervene Where the Brain is Stuck: Five Distinctive Levels of Brain Disharmony and Pain

Each of the five levels of brain processing react with a different kind of distress when it gets stuck. When we know the signs we will know the solutions.

There are five levels in the brain when we count the four in the right hemisphere control center and add the left hemisphere as the fifth. By knowing the characteristics of each we know when one level got stuck and what kind of interventions will help. For instance, explanations help Level 5 but will not stop a Level 2 terror like the fear of heights.

Results of Practicing Skill 18

- Skill Eighteen provides the wisdom and expertise to effectively solve problems so we reach peace.
- Pain no longer dominates our world.
- Brings strategic solutions to our relational tool belt so we effectively process pain and protect our relationships.
- Opens the door for freedom and flexibility with useful solutions that work.

Have you ever been stuck in a negative emotion when well-intentioned people tried to fix you without attunement? What about a time you were expected to do something but required a mature example?

Mike's Story

Mike sat with his friend Susan who was feeling intense sadness over some difficult family

relationships. Mike wanted to help Susan, so he gave her advice that she could apply to her situation. Mike believed his strategies, if followed, would help Susan better navigate her painful family dynamics.

Much to Mike's surprise, the more he offered his input, Susan's distress intensified. Rather than helping his friend, Mike was inadvertently adding gasoline onto a fire. At one point Susan turned to Mike and begged, "Can you stop trying to fix me? I don't need you to fix me Mike, I just want you to be here with me!" Mike was stunned by Susan's request. "Doesn't she want my help?" he wondered.

Mike bit his lip, and honored his friend's request. He sat in silence as Susan shared her grief. After a short time, Susan settled down and looked more peaceful. Susan expressed how much better she was feeling. She thanked Mike for being with her and said how much it helped her that Mike was able to stay present during her upset. Once calm, Susan asked to hear Mike's encouragement and advice for her family. Mike felt surprised but mostly relieved by Susan's response. He learned a valuable lesson that day about Skill Eighteen. His presence and love for his friend was more important than his advice during negative emotions.

As the story illustrates, there is no one size fits all for pain resolution and recovery. The pain of loss, fight/flee/freeze responses, negative emotions, immaturity and internal conflicts each require specific solutions.

Skill Nineteen - Recover from Complex Emotions: Handle Combinations of the Big Six Emotions

Complex injuries from life leave us hurting many ways at once. We recover when we combine our brain skills and use them in harmony.

Once we can return to joy and act like ourselves with the six big negative feelings taken one at a time, we can begin to learn how to return to joy and act like ourselves when the six are combined in various combinations.

Skill Nineteen is a solution to circumstances where emotions combine and intensify. Because the brain is a natural amplifier, emotions escalate which makes processing an event more difficult. When we experience a high-energy emotion (sympathetic arousal) that partners with an energy-draining emotion (parasympathetic response), the effect is similar to pressing the accelerator and brake simultaneously in your car

I clearly remember a time I needed Skill Nineteen.

I was in Mexico and about to try parasailing for the first time. While standing on a small wooden dock in the ocean, I was waiting for my turn to be harnessed and yanked into the glorious blue sky when a group of fellow parasailers caused a commotion. I heard yelling and screaming. I braced myself. I watched people jump up and down while looking down at their feet. "What do they see that I don't?" I asked before concluding, "This does not look good!"

Because I did not speak Spanish I could not understand what the distressed people were saying or yelling. My body was tense. Adrenaline surged through my veins. My heart raced. I was afraid!

Due to the limited space on the platform, I noticed hopeless feelings merge with my fear. There was no escape. I was trapped. As my energy threatened to leave, fear kept me vigilant.

I continued to assess the situation. I started to breathe and calm my body. I turned to God for deliverance, asking for peace into this most distressing moment. In my helplessness I asked God to intervene. I noticed some peace return. My breathing and body relaxed.

People began laughing, appearing more playful than before. I watched as sea crabs moved away from the spacing of the platform. They disappeared. I felt thankful for the relief. Soon I was off parasailing and enjoying myself. I now had a great story to tell my friends.

Thankfully the above experience was short-lived. Without attunement, this pain would have shifted to a deeper level of processing. (Skill Eighteen) Skill Nineteen keeps us grounded, relational and clear when emotional turbulence invades life and relationships. Every moment, painful or otherwise, can lead to joyful change.

Further Resources

[Joy Starts Here: The Transformation Zone](#)

[JoyQ Assessment](#)

[30 Days of Joy for Busy Married Couples](#)

[Jesus In Mind: Talks on Kingdom Life](#)

[THRIVE Skill Guides 52 weeks of training exercises](#)

Training Opportunities

[Connexus](#)

[THRIVE 5-day Training](#)

[Joy Rekindled Marriage Retreats](#)