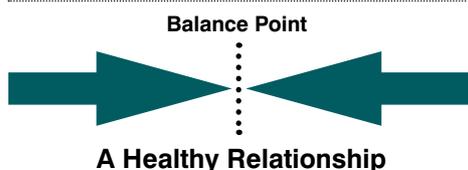


The Relationship Dance

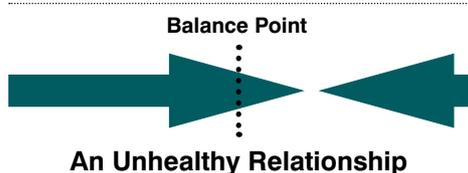
By Joe & Melody Cheal

“Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?”
Lewis Carroll (Alice in Wonderland)

In many ways, a love relationship is like a dance. When a relationship is healthy, we stand in the middle of the dance-floor and with permission we step forwards and backwards in harmony with one another, often returning to the middle. As a couple we flow, in balance, sometimes leading and sometimes following.



However, when a relationship is less than healthy, there becomes an imbalance. Sometimes only one person leads, either pushing or pulling a partner who doesn't necessarily want to go where they are being led. Alternatively, as one partner advances, the other retreats, so the first advances more and the second retreats more. They end up off the dance floor, perhaps with the retreating dancer pinned up against the wall. But all this may seem better than sitting alone by the side of the dance-floor



In NLP, we talk about the metaprogram of towards and away, i.e. we are motivated towards outcomes/pleasure and away from problems/pain. In relationships there is a related metaprogram which we (the authors)

“As a couple we flow, in balance, sometimes leading and sometimes following”

have called the advancing/retreating energy. When people are advancing energies, they do so because they need connection; they want to be with their partner, to see them, to talk with them and to sit right up close to them. When people are retreating energies, they need their own space; they want to be able to breathe.

Some couples flip back and forth between these energies and so a harmony is maintained. However, the issue arises when the two become permanently out of balance. The retreating energy finds the advancing energy smothering, threatening and perhaps suffocating; they want to step back and escape. The advancing energy feels abandoned and unloved; they want to step forward and fill the gap.

In real terms, the advancing can happen physically (wanting to hold hands, touch

and hug), mentally (talking at and sharing their views, opinions, thoughts and ideas) and emotionally (expressing joy, upset, anger etc.). Retreating can also be physical, mental and emotional. Indeed it is possible for someone to be, for example, a retreating emotional energy but simultaneously an advancing mental energy. Like other metaprograms, the advancing/retreating energy can be context specific.

Where do we learn to dance and how do we choose a partner?

It is likely that we learn the relationship dance at a very early age from our parents and other significant caregivers. If the template we see and learn is healthy, we will probably have a better chance of finding and creating balanced relationships later on.

If our parents are our main role models early in life, we are likely to model our same-sex parent and hence form a partner-template based on our opposite-sex parent. Now before you get squeamish and accuse us of being overly Freudian, remember we are generalising here. Some people find attractiveness in the same-sex template and others either form a counter template or do not work from the parent template at all. However, consider your relationships past and present. Think about the physical characteristics of people you find attractive



“ It is likely that we learn the relationship dance at a very early age from our parents and other significant caregivers ”

(e.g. height, hair colour and eye colour) or their 'personality' (e.g. warm, cool, friendly, aloof etc.) Notice any connections?

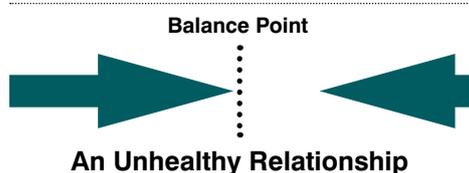
The likelihood is we will be attracted unconsciously to someone with the opposite energy to us. For example, if we are balanced, it is likely we will find a balanced energy. If we are advancing, it makes sense to choose a retreating energy. If we are retreating, we will probably seek out an advancing energy.

Of course, many couples stay together for life as extreme advancing and retreating energies. They fit each other's pathologies and so they 'fit'. However, although this may 'feel right' on some level, it may be less than rewarding on others. Consider the couples that stay unhappily married simply because they 'fit' one another.

Does this mean two advancing energies couldn't relate to one another? They can, although they may find themselves in competition with one another and bumping against each other. And two retreating energies might live quite single lives whilst being married. Both cases might work, but what if a couple want to create a balanced dance?

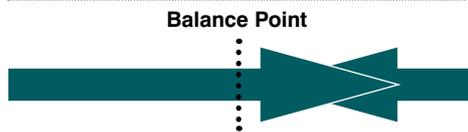
How do we dance with love, balance and grace?

The first step is to return to the balance point. If ▶



▶ you are an advancing energy, step back and give your partner space.

If you are a withdrawing energy, step forward and embrace your partner.



An Unhealthy Relationship

The interesting thing is that it only takes one person to change the dynamic. If you return to the centre of the floor, your partner will need to return back in order to continue dancing.

Of course this is sometimes easier said than done. To go against our template and conditioning may feel less than comfortable, or perhaps even a little scary. For some, it may feel like too much of a risk. What if my partner doesn't step forward, fill the space and return to the balance point? What if I step forward and embrace my partner, only to find they embrace me back and won't let go?

If the advancing steps back, it may take a while for the retreating to trust and step forward. Likewise, if the retreating steps

forward, the advancing may take a while to step back. This can be challenging for both parties. The partner who wants balance could do some pacing and leading, taking it one small step at a time rather than dashing back to the centre of the floor. It also helps if the partner who wants balance communicates how they feel and what they want: "This is where I'm at in our relationship and I'd like us to..."

What if our partner isn't prepared to change step?

Now we have the tough bit. If one partner desires change but the other partner absolutely doesn't, then the first person has options like: return to how it was before or change partner. If the relationship is working in every other way, is the 'partner-desiring-change' prepared to live with things as they are? Unless someone is in a highly destructive relationship, we might encourage them to try out a range of different moves before leaving the dance altogether. However, if the other partner is simply not prepared to change and all other options have been exhausted, it may be time to move on.

There is an important dance lesson here though. Before finding another partner, it is beneficial to learn to balance one self.

For those who are normally the advancing energy, they will need to find ways of being self sufficient and happy in their own company. For those who are normally the retreating energy, they will need to be open to intimacy and prepared to share their space. Without personal balance, a person may well find themselves with a new partner who has the same old dance moves as all their previous partners.

Where else does this apply?

The advancing /retreating energy metaprogram has applications beyond love relationships. You can just as easily play out the dance in the workplace. A 'micro manager' who wants to know the details of everything you are doing can feel like an advancing energy. The manager who is hard to get hold of may feel like they are retreating.

As well as your love relationship, consider some of the other relationships you have. What is the dynamic you play out with friends, with family and with people at work? When, where and how might you benefit by returning to a balance point?

Enjoy the dance, for without the dance, there is nothing. ■

“ We are motivated towards outcomes/ pleasure and away from problems/pain ”



Joe and Melody Cheal have been working with NLP since 1993 and married since 1994. As well as being Master Trainers of NLP, they are also partners in the GWiz Learning Partnership www.gwiztraining.com, transforming people and businesses through the fields of personal, professional, leadership and organisational development.

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