

## Learn how to give your marriage A New Lease of Love

*No relationship is perfect, right? Wrong, according to (very happily married) counsellors Seana McGee and Maurice Taylor, whose NewCouple theory promises to make a good partnership even better. Anna Maxted and her husband Phil put it to the test*

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### Seana & Maurice's ten new laws of love

1. **Chemistry:** Sexual exclusivity and best friendship with your partner.
2. **Priority:** Your mother does not take precedence over your partner.
3. **Emotional Integrity:** Not scapegoating your partner for your own issues.
4. **Deep Listening:** Hearing, not interrupting, and understanding.
5. **Equality:** The traditional role models are outdated; mutual respect is key.
6. **Peacemaking:** Forgiveness is not an act of will. Learn how to forgive.
7. **Self-Love:** Don't expect your partner to make up for any self-esteem that you lack.
8. **Mission In Life:** Know what you want from life, have independent goals.
9. **Leaving** Your attitude depends on you knowing you're in this voluntarily.
10. **Transformational education:** The willingness to learn rules one to nine, and act by them.

How to resolve a row

If you and your partner have an argument, the person who is more passive should say to the aggressor, 'Time out' After a cooling-off period, you should then reconvene to discuss how to proceed in an adult way.

### **Phil's thoughts on the NewCouple weekend**

If any of the class thought they'd be able to get through the workshop slurping coffee and dozing, they were mistaken. We were told we had to show ourselves more compassion and openly state our self-love. This is a nightmare for most men, who like me are not used to sharing such things. We like our logic on a spreadsheet and people such as Maurice and Seana pressure us into remembering bad times that we'd rather forget - the memories that cause arguments.

Maurice and Seana know that the men in here are nervous. Their eyes connect with each of us, one at a time, which I find very disconcerting. So when Seana, a mighty blend of Denise Royle and Goldle Hawn, tells me to fix my wife with deep, loving, compassionate eyes during the listening exercise, I jam up.

But soon afterwards, I stop turning purple with extreme embarrassment and think about what is being said. Seana talks about Carl Jung's theories of transference and individualisation and it starts to make sense. It struck me that what we should be doing is listening - to others and to ourselves. You have to be a lot of things in a relationship: lover, brother, father, friend. I don't think listener is too much to ask.

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### **Brits turn on, big time**

When the Brits turn on, they turn on big time!' declares Seana McGee, beaming around the room. Maurice Taylor, her husband and fellow psychotherapist, nods, adding, 'You guys were awesome. We coached an American group last week and you leave them way behind.' We, the star pupils, sit in rows grinning, exhausted, proud and - I do not jest - a little bit more in love with our partners. Not only had this shrinky stuff worked, We'd discovered that we weren't the nation of emotional numbskulls we'd presumed.

A far cry from the previous morning. Forty British bottoms had frozen in their seats as Seana, 46, and Maurice - to quote my horrified husband Phil - 'love-bombed' us. Maurice, 41, a bluff Californian, lamented the terrorism in America and told how we could create peace on the Planet by becoming functional couples and feeling empowered in our own homes, how he and Seana were thrilled to see us and - I believe he said this, though I was too traumatised to compute - the love and warmth shining from our beautiful faces.

## **We were fearful**

The NewCouple relationship weekend would be even worse than I'd imagined, I decided, squirming. It is, allegedly, a revolutionary method of counselling for couples who don't necessarily have problems. It cites 'ten new laws of love' that transform the way we relate to our partners, prevent resentments occurring, and lead to a happy relationship and life, no less. Now the last therapist I'd seen had told me that I secretly wished my husband was dead. Phil was going to the jungle; I was scared he'd perish. (Clue: my father had just died.) When I disagreed about the death wish, she pronounced the desire unconscious. So I was naturally sceptical about this weekend.

I wasn't the only one. 'I was scared to death,' says Robert, 45, a marketing consultant from Berkshire, 'dragged' to the course by his wife, Henrietta, 40. 'I wanted to run out of the room. I thought I'd be exposed in front of all these people.'

It is, therefore, a relief to find that there is no enforced blurting. If we wish to offer personal information, we can. Otherwise, we work privately in pairs. The second pleasant surprise is that Seana and Maurice are delightful - happy to joke about themselves, their dysfunctional families and the many dips in their own 13-year relationship. They are, I realise - having shamelessly misjudged them - intelligent, compassionate and superb at their jobs. Within ten minutes of the first exercise - 'What do you recall about the chemistry at the beginning of your relationship?' - my husband surprises and shocks me.

## **Deep Listening**

We'd been instructed to take turns talking for two minutes while the other person listens in silence. I warble on about sparks flying and birds tweeting. Phil remembers how meanly I'd treated him because I'd felt that he was too keen. He admits that he still resents me a little for damaging his confidence. I am appalled and relieved at the same time. Now I can put it right. Quite a few partners drop similar bombs - one man pronounces what he'd heard 'horrible'.

I feel dreadful but Maurice reminds us that no one is to blame. Taylor and McGee's work is based on the belief that traditional notions of love and marriage are outdated. Seana explains, 'the old idea is that an intimate relationship is instinctive. We're hypnotised into believing that love is enough. That's a romantic fantasy. It's shamed us into remaining relationship-illiterate.' She adds, 'The divorce rate in the US is 70 per cent, and 50 per cent here. And what percentage of those who stay together do you think are content? Ten? Five? Maurice and I believe our parents' early deaths were due to their completely miserable marriages. The traditional relationship model is the culprit. We need a powerful new replacement, We have evolved.'

### **Blueprint for Happiness**

Taylor and McGee's blueprint for happiness is the culmination of a huge body of research. Their book *The New Couple: Why the old Rules Don't Work and What Does* - took seven years to write. But the principles can be learned in days, and practised for ever. Maurice says, 'We are teaching you three relationship skills: emotional literacy, deep listening and conflict resolution.'

The unique boast of their course should be that whereas most therapy dawdles for decades before chancing upon the problems, theirs diagnoses the issues within hours. The psychoanalytical thinking behind their work is that we begin a liaison intoxicated with our partners (Our intoxication stage lasted two minutes,' says Maurice), then 'transference' kicks in. 'We expect our mate to make up for the defects in our upbringing,' explains Seana. 'Every time a childhood need is unmet, we freeze, and wait for someone to come along and meet it. Unconsciously, we're looking for mummy and daddy.' As the class giggles, embarrassed, she adds, 'It's not sexy. Why do you think your love life deteriorates?'

The theory explains the reality. When we fly into a rage with our partner for leaving his tea bag in the sink, up to 80 per cent of our fury is because our father always left his tea bag in the sink, and, incidentally, our mother did all the cooking and cleaning, and there is no way that we want to repeat that old-fashioned pattern of master and slave (never mind if our partner does the washing and ironing - the tea bag incident triggers a memory, irrational fear, disproportionate rage and resentment). As Seana says, 'It's a case of mistaken identity.'

### **You could start out with the skills**

Emma, 24, from Limerick, has been married to Andy, 28, for less than a month. Still in the blushy stage of love, they are not typical candidates for marriage counselling, but Emma says, 'My parents are divorced. I want to learn from their mistakes. I've seen a relationship get to the stage where it's too late. If you start out with the skills that this workshop gives you, you have more chance of working things out. At the beginning,' she adds, 'I thought, this is completely over-the-top American stuff. But it's wonderful. The deep listening exercise is great. Whenever Andy says something, I want to butt in, but I am forced to listen. Once you recognise where your problems come from, you have the power to change.'

### **How to Row**

How we row is tackled, too. Sadly, most of us harbour an inner child who appears when tempers fray, and yells, 'I don't care what you think, stop telling me what to do!' We also retain a critic - a mean, spiteful creature - prone to such declarations as, 'You idiot, can't you do anything right?' Not a healthy way to interact. As Maurice says, 'We express from one of three sub-personalities: the child, the critic, the adult. The adult is the only place on the triangle that's self-aware.'

Taylor and McGee pinpoint 15 types of anger that are unacceptable (from belittling names disguised as endearments, such as Fluffhead, to minimalising a partner's experience, saying, for example, 'You're making a fuss about nothing'). It is a surprise to most of us to discover how angry we are. And how disrespectful. But we are given the tools to trace the source and deal with it. This, for many, involves boohooing. But, as Seana says, 'If you don't grieve, you can't heal.'

## Path to Peace

The most popular exercise is 'the Path to Peace'. Robert says, 'That was a big discovery for me.' Each person begins by pinpointing a gripe. The next steps are Sadness, Fear, Ownership and Empathy. My path is: 'I felt angry when you left your socks on the floor last night. I feel sad because I think you expect me to pick up after you. I fear that you don't respect me and the relationship is doomed (the fear stage can be, and mostly is, wildly irrational). I accept responsibility for being obsessive about tidiness. I appreciate that yesterday you were tired and probably forgot.'

Then it's Phil's turn. As I hate being told off, this isn't easy. And while my darling and I uncover certain niggles, not all are resolved. This workshop teaches you the crucial skill of identifying and expressing the emotions behind what you say, but it isn't supposed to be the final word. For those who wish to investigate their discoveries further, Seana and Maurice run private follow-up sessions. As Maurice says, 'Let this be the beginning of an exploration.'

## A love letter to your partner

Our final project is to write a love letter to our partner. The following day, Phil uncharacteristically owns up to a feeling of serenity. 'I don't think,' he says, 'that anyone can afford not to do that workshop.' To my surprise, I agree.

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Book a place on the Relationship and Communication Weekend on line

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Individual or Couple 'Tune Ups' are available with Maurice and Seanain the week following the workshop in St Johns Wood NW8. Sessions last 1.5 hrs, cost £150 cash or cheque. Couples wanting to book a 'Tune Up' session please Email: [maurice@newcouple.com](mailto:maurice@newcouple.com) or UK Mobile Tel: 07984 675 627



The Book

## The New Couple: Why the Old Rules Don't Work and What Does

(HarperSF) by Seana McGee and Maurice Taylor  
available from: Hoffman Institute £16 + £2 p&p

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