

CHAPTER SIX: DEVELOPING A NEW RULE BOOK

It seems to me that it is men's self identity that determines how they act. So, by promoting new masculine identities men will start to change; their relationships with women will begin to improve and the world can only be a better place for that. All those horrible things men do, that every day, make my newspaper seem so heavy, are about men still living out the traditional stereotype of being stoic, steadfast and dominant, as if life is a nick. These characteristics may have been useful in the old days (though I doubt even that). The quest is for new ways for men to be. New definitions of masculinity. Rewriting 'The Right Stuff'.

(Garth Baker, in *One of the Boys*, p. 250)

Like Garth, each of us needs to develop the skills to act towards others in ways that are respectful. You may have been conned by the Old Rule Book and the family you grew up in to behave in certain ways. Like any con, it loses its power once it is exposed. Once you see the situation for what it is you are in a strong position to make other choices.

In this chapter we will explore re-writing the Old Rule Book and experiment with new ways to deal with old dilemmas.

Remember what was stated at the beginning of this book: human nature invites you to do more of the same types of behaviour to resolve a problem — only to find yourself even further stuck. You are now at the point of action in the process of change. Now you understand where your patterns of behaviour originate and what supports exist for their continuation, you are in a good position to rewrite your own story. This chapter will explore what it means to develop a New Rule Book, to act respectfully towards others, and to be more in touch with the emotions and thoughts behind our self-righteous anger

The next chapter continues with Level 5 changes, introducing specific skills around communication, dealing with jealousy and problem-solving — all important skills for living a non-abusive lifestyle.

In the following pages, you will find concrete ways to begin to change unhelpful and unhealthy patterns which breed mistrust and disrespect, replacing them with helpful and constructive patterns. These new patterns will increase trust, respect and equality in your relationships with others, particularly your intimate relationships with partners, children and friends.

Pioneering the New

By now you will be very clear about how limiting and harmful to yourself and others the Old Rule Book can be. Writing a New Rule Book is a huge challenge, but one that you, like many other men, are capable of taking on. The New Rule Book is very different in that it is based on being powerful alongside others, not at the expense of others. It embodies recognising what you and others have to offer, giving equal weight to each story. The New Rule Book would look something like that on page 144.

Seeing these statements can bring up some daunting feelings because what you are being asked to do is stand up against a lifetime of learning and embark on a new pathway.

Some men get scared off by how radical this course of action is and want to stay with a very conservative position. That conservative position has probably got you to the point of reading this book. Perhaps it is time to break out and be a bit radical. You might even enjoy it!

In the following parts of this book we will explore with you in some detail the skills that will be useful in embracing this New Rule Book. If you doubt your ability to succeed, ask yourself, 'How have I managed to get this far?' It is important to recognise what you have achieved to date.

The Respect Test

Respect and trust are two of the most important aspects of relationships. Add to these responsibility (being clear about what is our responsibility and what is others) and relating (being able to express ourselves), and you end up with skills that will do you well in your life. These three R's Respect, Responsibility and Relating — tell us and others a great deal.

Respect is an interesting concept. I grew up in a generation where there was an expectation to respect one's parents regardless of whether they deserved respect or not. I have come to understand over the years that there are two different types of respect that which is attached to a role (for example that of parent, politician, police officer and so on) and that which is earned from the way people act towards others.

It is hard to respect someone who is abusive towards others they care about. Respect may be conditional upon certain actions in various situations.

Jock (45) lives in a small rural town and had a reputation as a fighter. He was always willing to take someone outside and deal with them. This was a way he kept his sense of pride as a man 's man who could take care of himself

Unfortunately, Jock was operating under an illusion.

Firstly, people were afraid of Jock and his behaviour (he was banned from several of the local hotels), whereas Jock thought he was respected. Secondly, his children would get a hard time at school about their father who was perceived in the wider community as unable to keep his fists to himself always itching for a fight. They bore the brunt of Jock's public behaviour.

Jock's behaviour was well entrenched when he came to see me. He had survived a lifetime of trouble, particularly public violence, and had come out unscarred. What Jock came to understand was that he wasn't respected, only feared. His children were

too embarrassed and afraid to tell him what was happening at school for fear he would make it worse. And as he got older he was painting himself into a corner by having to defend his position as top dog from younger, fitter men.

The New Rule Book for Men

1. Strength means different things to different people. Strength is defined as knowing yourself; your abilities, your needs, and sorting these out in respectful ways. Both men and women can be strong in physical, emotional, and verbal ways.
2. Well-made decisions use a range of styles, including rationale, logic, intuition and emotion. Each style has a valuable contribution to make and no one style is more important than another.
3. Real men are powerful but not at the expense of others. Real men have an understanding that power is not a finite commodity but something that is to be shared. Power is used to increase, not decrease, the opportunities of others.
4. Masculine and feminine attributes are of equal importance. Men are not more important than women, and women are not more important than men. It is essential to value the differences and the similarities.
5. Work and career are part of our lives. Other roles — such as being a good father, partner and friend — are of equal importance. The New Rule Book says that men don't duck Out of their social and emotional responsibilities. They balance their lives with a range of activities that enhance positive self-esteem.
6. Self-esteem is established through knowing ourselves, being respected and respectful, and honest about who we are.
7. Men and women work in partnership to create a better situation for everyone. Entitlements are negotiated between people, not given.
8. It takes strength, energy and courage to seek out help when problems arise. Real men acknowledge difficulties and deal with them directly in ways that are not abusive to others.
9. Real men are in touch with their emotions, and are able to identify and express them. Men are genuine and honest in letting others know what they are feeling. The only weakness is hiding yourself from yourself.
10. Communication is the most important tool in relationships, so real men take the time and energy to express themselves and hear others in ways that are appropriate and non-abusive.
11. Intimacy and sharing are the most important parts of sexuality. This requires men to be present physically, emotionally and verbally during this time.
12. Real men are able to feel comfortable enough to risk being honest with other men and respect other men's need to share with them.
13. It is unacceptable for men to use power, dominance and violence to keep control inside and outside the home. Real men see the ultimate costs of this behaviour and take steps to ensure they act respectfully towards others.
14. Real men take care of their physical and emotional health, balancing the demands of work, home and recreation.

I have included Jock's story because it demonstrates the issue about which attitudes and behaviours we are respected for. Jock thought he was respected. Others didn't see it that way, much to Jock's horror. The respect people had for Jock was born out of their fear, which, ironically, fed his sense of masculinity.

When his family were young Jock was the hero, known around the community for his exploits with his fists. He was like a giant to his children, very powerful and knowing. Jock was modelling important lessons to his boys and girls. He was the law at home, had most power to influence decisions, was aloof, but kept people in line. At some point this changed, his children began to realise that 'the world according to Jock' was not one shared by all. This brought about huge disappointments, confusion and uncertainty.

By this stage both of Jock's boys had been suspended at various times from school for fighting with other boys. 'Like father, like son', was what people would say. This shows in some ways how easily labels can stick with people. The legacy Jock was passing on to his boys would see them becoming like Dad — street and pub fighters. Jock had run with gangs and knew what this would mean for his boys.

So how do we know whether Jock's behaviour generates fear or a genuine feeling of admiration for who he is or what he does? We could apply the simple Respect Test. This is a question that you can ask about any interaction between people:

'Does this interaction build or lessen respect, safety and trust for this person or does it demean them in some way?'

Abusive behaviour is clearly at the expense of others, whereas respectful behaviour enhances all concerned. It is important to distinguish and separate the issue from the person. This is often where there is confusion in sorting out issues as people make all sorts of assumptions without checking out the details.

Everyone has different life experiences, attitudes and beliefs. What often happens is that you may forget this and want to force your ideas, ways of doing things and attitudes onto others. You can become frustrated, annoyed and threatened if others don't agree with you, or at least aren't seen to be agreeing. This is where being clear about the person and the ideas is vitally important.

Healthy relationships are those where people feel free to disagree. This does not mean that people don't like or are judging you; it simply means that, from their experiences and understanding, they have a different view. Remember, there is no ultimate truth to any situation; you can agree to disagree over an issue and still remain friends.

Charlie (46) had been around. He had travelled widely, worked in many jobs and had had three significant relationships. What Charlie found hardest in his relationships was when people disagreed with him. He was an expert on everything, doing more talking than listening. People found Charlie a difficult man to be around because they felt unheard most of the time, discounted for their views and embarrassed by Charlie's behaviour. Charlie was the ultimate know-it-all.

Charlie used to get very frustrated when he was aware people weren't listening to 'his' good ideas and beliefs. Many people actively avoided him, perceiving him as a bore. The more isolated Charlie became, the more he tried to force people to listen to him. He would berate his partner about their 'stupid' friends. When she told him how she saw the situation he threatened her, at which point she left.

Charlie came to me, perplexed about his situation. When we explored the situation in more depth he became aware of his fears of not being good enough and not being respected. Over the following months Charlie began to understand that respect was not given, that it was earned, and that his pattern of behaviour had become destructive.

In order to fully understand his situation Charlie had to face his fears and risk, for the first time, really hearing what it was others were saying to him. He was an expert at censoring out material that he found too threatening to his sense of self. He interpreted any criticism as a personal attack and not as concern about his abusive behaviour from others.

Like many men, Charlie's fears of what might happen if he did open himself up to hearing others was much greater than the reality. He went on to recognise that he had a strong need to be accepted which he had confused with the need for others to agree with him. He was capable of making the distinction between himself as a person and his ideas and beliefs; that others' disagreement had little to do with how they saw him.

Questions to Ponder

- What will help me remember to apply the Respect Test to my interactions?
- What would get in the way of me carrying out the Respect Test in my contact with others?
- How will I ensure that I will put the necessary time and energy into respecting others?
- What are the signs that I am demeaning a person when I interact with them?
- Will I give up the Respect Test as not useful if I find myself failing it or will I persevere until I get it right?

These questions are central to a non-abusive lifestyle. 'I don't know' answers are okay. I know some men who carry little reminder cards in their wallets. Others approach situations that they know are going to be difficult by asking themselves the question: 'How will I maintain my respect for this person for the time we are together?'

Rodney (32), had great difficulty relating to his wife's mother. Before she visited he would think of all the negative things about her. That warmed him up to act disrespectfully towards her when she arrived. He would end up arguing with her about all sorts of irrelevant issues, just for the sake of it. When Rodney was asked to apply the Respect Test to his interactions with his mother-in-law, he was less than willing. After putting aside his own resistance by focusing on how his behaviour put his wife in a difficult position, he reluctantly agreed to give it a go.




Reminding himself of the Respect Test, he prepared for his mother-in-law's arrival by trying to put himself in her shoes. When she came in he said that while they had argued a great deal in the past he was not happy with this situation, and informed her he was planning to be more respectful towards her. Rodney stated that, for the first time, he was able to talk with his mother-in-law without just reacting to her. This was a major breakthrough.

Rodney's story shows that it is easy to develop patterns of disrespect that escalate to a point where they form the basis of all future interactions.

A couple of weeks later Rodney’s father-in-law was hospitalised with a heart attack. It was Rodney who picked up his mother-in-law and took her to the hospital, sitting with her through the early hours of the morning. This signalled a significant turning point in their relationship.

Exercise

Think of three men and three women whom you respect.

-  What are the qualities about these people that contribute towards your respect for them?
-  How does the way these people act invite you to respect them?
-  How do you want to be respected — out of fear, or because of who you are and how you act towards others?

Now decide if these people are good models for you when it comes to respectful ways of being with others. You might want to talk with them further about how they have managed to achieve this and whether they have ideas that will be helpful to you.

As part of developing the New Rule Book, the Equality and Respect Wall (page 7) is helpful. This is the other side of the Power and Control Wall (Chapter 1, page 14) which generates mistrust, hurt and fear in others — not worthy attributes for a healthy and trustworthy relationship. Embracing a non-abusive lifestyle will require you to see things differently and to keep the Respect Test operating. It also requires you to recognise the importance of the human side of interaction with others, giving that time and priority.

At the beginning I asked you to fill out the Abuse Checklist each day as a way of bringing into your consciousness the range of behaviours that you may not even have been aware of. Like that checklist the Equality and Respect Checklist is one of the tools that can mark your progress towards a more trusting and respectful relationship. Each day from now on place a tick next to the behaviours you have used in situations where previously you may have resorted to abusive behaviour.

Equality and Respect Wall			
<i>Trust</i>	<i>Non-threatening behaviour</i>	<i>Economic partnership</i>	
	<i>Honesty and accountability</i>	<i>Responsible parenting</i>	
<i>Shared responsibility</i>			<i>Support</i>
	<i>Respect</i>	<i>Negotiation and fairness</i>	

Equality and Respect Checklist

Non-threatening Behaviour

- Talked and acted in ways that made others feel safe.
- Allowed others to leave if they wished.
- Was aware of body posture, movements and loudness.

Respect

- Listened to others without judging them.
- Valued others' opinions.
- Agreed to disagree.
- Allowed others the space to have their say.
- Used the Respect Test frequently.
- Used person's name, not a label.

Trust and Support

- Supported others in their choices.
- Respected others to have their own feelings.
- Allowed others to choose their friends.
- Allowed others to have their opinion.

Honesty and Accountability

- Accepted responsibility for myself and my behaviour.
- Acknowledged my past abuse.
- Admitted being wrong.
- Communicated honestly and truthfully.

Responsible Parenting

- Kept the boundary between adult issues and children's issues.
- Shared fully in parenting responsibilities.
- Was a positive, non-abusive model for children.

Shared Responsibility

- Mutually agreed on fair distribution of work.
- Made family decisions together
- Talked regularly about important issues.

Economic Partnership

- Made money decisions together.

- Made sure everyone benefits from any arrangements concerning money.

Negotiation and Fairness

- Worked out conflicts so that there were no winners or losers.
- Accepted change.
- Was willing to compromise.

Questions to Ponder

- How will I be aware of when I am treating others with trust and respect?
- How will I feel when I tick behaviours on the Equality and Respect Test? What does it help me realise?
- Do I feel more, or less, proud acting towards others from the New Rule Book?

Towards Intimate and Respectful Relationships

Relationships can be hard work, especially if you have come from a family which has a history of abuse. Some men want to hide behind their upbringing, using it as an excuse for not changing, and lack the courage to face up to what is now happening in their lives. I believe that at the end of the day each of us needs to be responsible for our actions, the choice being to keep freeing ourselves from our past stories and rewriting new stories about how we can be. You may be underskilled for the task of relating to others in respectful ways. Many men get it mostly right during courtship in the early days of relationships but this situation often changes after the honeymoon period. A great deal of time is spent experimenting with how to do it right.

To develop and maintain a truly intimate relationship requires you to see the other person as different but equal. This is an ongoing struggle in the best of relationships and reflects the nature of close relationships. Our society encourages judgement and labels about people based on all sorts of false information and erroneous beliefs. Harriet Goldner Lerner gives us a clue to what intimacy means:

For starters, intimacy means that we can be who we are in a relationship, and allow the other person to do the same. 'Being who we are' requires that we can talk openly about things that are important to us, that we take a clear position on where we stand on important emotional issues, and that we clarify the limits of what is acceptable and tolerable to us in a relationship. 'Allowing the other to do the same' means that we can stay emotionally connected to that other party who thinks, feels and believes differently, without needing to change, convince, or fix the other.

An intimate relationship is one in which neither party silences, sacrifices, or betrays the self and each party expresses strength and vulnerability, weakness and competence in a balanced way. (The Dance of Intimacy, Harriet Goldner Lerner, p. 3)

So a truly intimate relationship asks men to stand up against the Old Rule Book and develop new behaviours. It requires you to give up the game plan of winning at all costs, playing the expert, and putting others down. It invites a different response — to be honest, open, and to take up the responsibility for letting others know about your emotional life. It also requires

clear changes to behaviours that create problems for yourself and others. This is perhaps the most difficult challenge adult men face.

So how do we develop this intimacy? This is a combination of honest expression of thoughts, feelings and beliefs; a belief in non-ownership of others and spending time together working difficulties out and having fun. Let's look at each of these in more detail.

Responsibility for our Emotional Lives

Men in our society have grown up with pretty mixed messages about emotions. You will have been told that it is not okay to express your emotions. It's as if men have only a few emotions to express. For example, you may express self-righteous anger when feeling upset, jealousy when worried, or rage when undermined.

It has been my experience that men often confuse emotions (feelings) with actions that are abusive and violent, and vice versa. As an understandable explanation, according to the Old Rule Book, it is easier to say 'I got angry', or 'I was jealous', than to say, 'I was abusive.' In fact, this narrowly defined repertoire of emotions covers up a range of other feelings. These other emotions are very often hurt, sadness, fear, insecurity, and so on. Many men ask me to explain the relationship between their emotions and becoming overwhelmed with self-righteous anger.

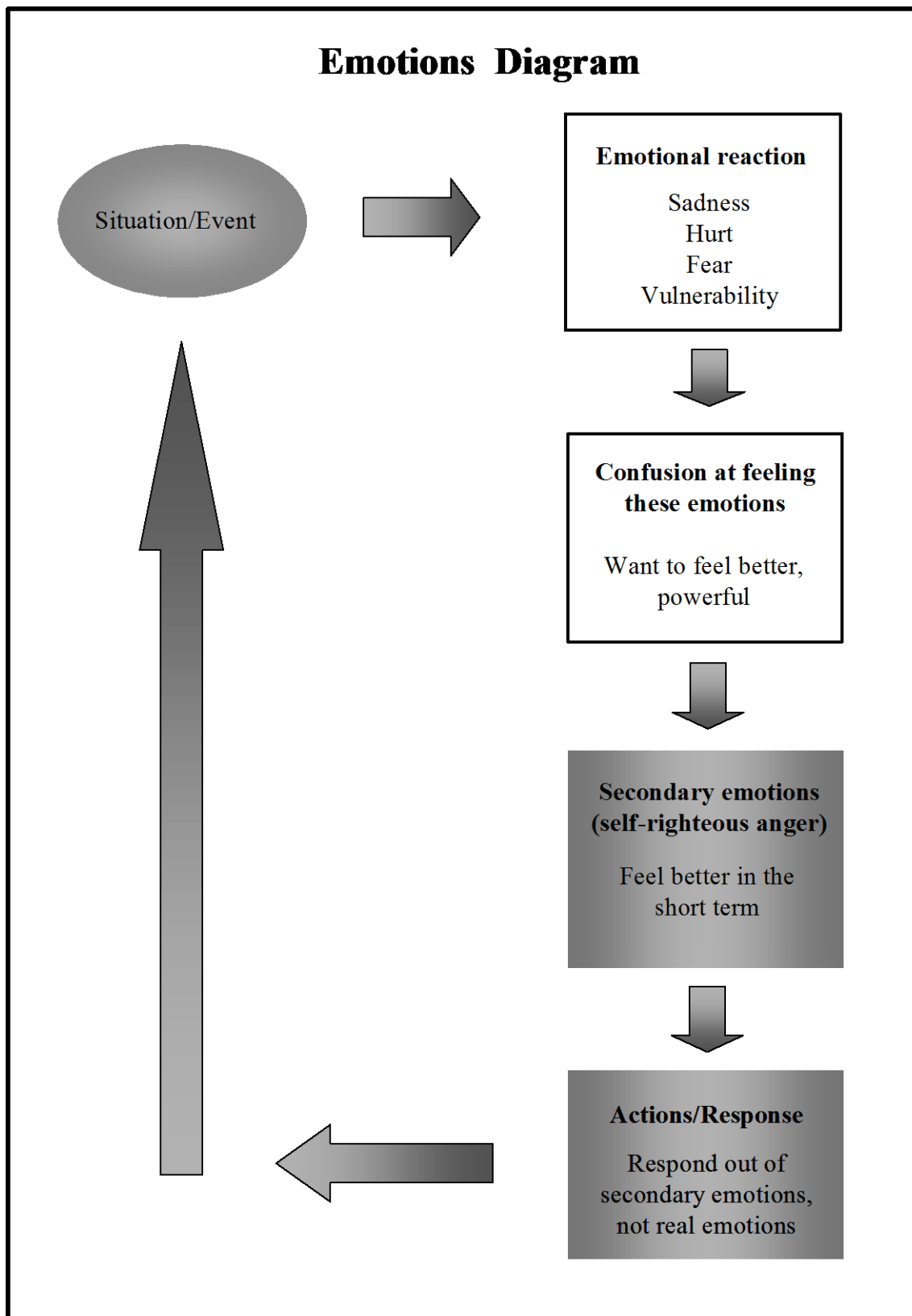
You may find yourself caught in a self-reinforcing pattern when it comes to expressing emotions. The diagram on page 11 outlines the process. In any situation you are having emotional reactions all the time, whether you recognise this or not. These first-level emotions are often uncomfortable and bring up feelings of vulnerability, worry and fear. If men have been told that it is not appropriate for 'real men' to express themselves in this way, what happens when these powerful feelings occur? Men state they can feel overwhelmed by a feeling of inadequacy. They feel trapped by what they perceive as their failures when it comes to measuring up to the male blueprint.

This is often very confusing because the Old Rule Book states that men are judged not by how well they connect with others, but, for example, by what size house or car they have, the kind of wife they have, whether they can fix things, and what status they have in relationship to others — that is, where they fit into the male hierarchy.

Very early on you will have learnt not to express the strong first-level emotions, being ridiculed if you did. How many times have you been told 'Don't be a girl' or something similar if you acted in a 'non-male' way or showed any of your gentler emotions? How many times have you received the equally damning message that 'Big boys don't cry', which robs you of your ability to fully grieve over the sad times in life — the death of close friends or family, relationship break-ups, the loss of a job, and so on. It is little wonder you may struggle with being clear about the emotional side of life.

If you are confused about how to face and deal with the fear of failure, then you are not alone. One way to deal with these powerful feelings is to switch into power-taking behaviour (remember this is one of the rules in the Old Rule Book), rather than risk fronting up to feelings of vulnerability.

The rule that says men don't have emotions, combined with the strong urge to feel okay, invites men to move into the mode of self-righteous anger. This might make you feel good in the short term but will have a disastrous impact on those around you.



Remember that this one-up/one-down relationship is a part of the cycle of abuse. This self-righteous anger has acted as a survival mechanism for men. But the thinking behind men's emotional life stories is flawed. While self-righteous anger may feel good in the short term, very soon you are back with your old feelings and the pattern starts again.

So how do you change this pattern, given that it is so much a part of who you are? The answer is both simple and hard. Simple because it requires that you become bilingual in your expression. Becoming bilingual means reclaiming the language of emotional expression in addition to the language you now speak. I believe nearly all men know the language of emotional expression and are aware of most emotions, but being taught powerful messages about not expressing these, means we need practice.

When you are able to speak this different language you will have to overcome one of the major difficulties men have in communicating with others. I refer here to relationships with other men as much as I do with women and children.

Perhaps this is the answer to the age-old problem that I hear so much in my practice — men saying they don't understand women, and women saying they never know what men are really thinking and feeling. The challenge for men is to hear clearly what women are saying and take the risk of sharing their emotional selves.

Jack (38) told me in a session that:

'Whenever I began to get down or miserable I knew that if I got angry I would feel better. What I did was to pick a fight with someone to get that feeling of adrenalin pumping. I felt great for a while. The feeling never lasted long and I'd end up feeling down again. People began to keep away from me; they said I was unpleasant to be around. I got angry at that as well.'

Jack went on to realise that he had every reason to feel depressed. He was faced with the issue of coming to terms with the effects of a long-term illness that would eventually mean the loss of his mobility. By avoiding facing his fears Jack was not able to grieve for his loss of enjoyment of life. Jack played a very familiar script for men by trying to avoid facing his depression directly and developing a healthy response to his situation.

He also cut himself off from the many friends and loved ones who were prepared to support him, which would have meant he didn't have to face his illness alone. Others only saw the unpleasant side of Jack, not the man who was deeply worried about how his illness would affect him and his family.

The story behind Jack's anger is a very clear account of how self-righteous anger can be used as a cover-up for other feelings. Jack was restrained by his pride in coping by himself, his fears about admitting the reality of his condition, and his belief that to give in to feelings of depression was unmanly. So, anger is an emotion, a feeling like any other feeling.

What often happens with a feeling such as self-righteous anger is that it invites men to ignore the power of the underlying emotions and fly into a rage with others, instead of looking for what is really going on and dealing with issues appropriately.

Exercise



Pages 15-16 contain a list of feelings. For two weeks, sit down every day and check off the list of feelings you are aware of having experienced that day, paying particular attention to the underlying first level emotions behind the feelings of self-righteous anger. This will help you gain the language of emotions, one of the critical gaps in our

education. It will also give you a language with which you can talk with others in a way that is more meaningful and honest.

Unhealthy Expressions of Emotions

I want you to think of four animals for a moment — a turtle, a shark, a fox and an owl. If you think about these animals and how they deal with issues you may come up with the following. The turtle withdraws into its shell when the heat is on, not reappearing until the situation is safe. The shark will circle a couple of times and go in for the kill. The fox has a natural ability to strategise, taking its time to stalk its prey and waiting for the right moment to attack. The owl is perceived as wise, weighing up the situation from all sides.

Clearly I have put human qualities on these animals. The qualities of these animals can be perceived as styles people use to deal with conflict. I also believe they have relevance to men and how they express emotions. I will deal with the first three, then give the owl style the time it deserves in the section on knowing ourselves.

Let's start with the turtle. As noted, whenever something happens to threaten the turtle's sense of security, it withdraws and is seen to be sulking and uncommunicative. Turtles are often afraid of the power of their emotions. They will deny that they are feeling a certain way, doubt themselves, and intellectualise (convince themselves that the situation is better than it is). Or they may not believe they have the right to feel a certain way. Consider the following statements:

'I'm not angry, just upset.'

'She doesn't mean to get me upset.'

'I know he is just trying to get me going. I'm not going to get angry.'

'It's not that bad.'

'I'm not going to make waves. That's just how the world is and I'll just have to accept it.'

I remember during my early twenties going to a workshop on the male system and new roles for men. I thought I was pretty enlightened, having sorted out a lot for myself during my late teens and early twenties.

We were doing a group exercise on different aspects of masculine and feminine behaviour I remember (to my embarrassment now) that I saw myself as perfectly androgynous (equal in male and female aspects of my personality) and said so during that exercise. Another man said he didn't perceive me in the way I described. I was furious. How could this man not accept my perception of myself?

I stubbornly rejected what he said and chose not to hear his view of the situation. On reflection I learnt two very important lessons. Firstly, that others often saw me for how I was, not what I might say I was. Secondly, I did indeed get angry but didn't acknowledge or show it.

I had this idea that I very rarely got angry. In fact what I discovered was that I got angry all right, but I handled it by withdrawing into myself, brooding and trying to win by arguing my way out of the situation. Sometimes I would brood about a situation for days. I was the ultimate turtle, a pattern I have struggled to change over the years.

Turtles are slow-burning people who often become withdrawn or depressed. Becoming depressed and withdrawn can be a powerful way to retain power in a situation. Turtles often

express negative emotions in subtle ways such as quiet criticism, emotional withdrawal, put-downs, and subtle intimidation. They may do all of these things with a smile on their face. Turtles often reach exploding point, leaving people quite confused. Comments such as 'That's totally out of character' and 'He must be having a hard time at the moment' excuse and mask the pattern that exists.

Lester (42) was referred because his relationship with Sue (40) was getting progressively worse. Sue worked as an accountant, drove a flash car (supplied by the firm) and earned more money than Lester. Whenever they talked about money, the conversation would last for a short time before Lester would go quiet. He often left halfway through a discussion, saying he had forgotten something at work. Lester was self employed, and with the downturn in the economy he had been struggling to make ends meet.

Lester put huge amounts of energy into avoiding talking about the issue of money in the relationship. When Sue wanted to talk about what this meant he was quick to deny that there was a problem and switched off. Lester came to me when Sue said that unless he changed she was leaving.

Lester discovered that he had some very real feelings about Sue and her career. It seemed to him that the more successful she became, the more demeaned he felt. Lester was working with beliefs that said men were the major income earners and should be the ones to provide well for the family. He also feared failure as a result because he knew Sue could live without him.

Lester was stuck with a belief system that belonged to previous generations. It is questionable how well that system worked back then, and this thinking severely limits a modern-day relationship. Refusing to talk about important issues (just like his father) was making the situation worse, not better. You can see how powerful turtle-type behaviour can be.

Lester was able to say that he was afraid Sue would leave him because she would see him as a loser. He did not feel comfortable around her peers and felt judged when in their company.

This level of expression helped Sue to see Lester in a new light. She had spent twenty years of her life with this man, had borne three children to him and wanted a future together. By hearing how life with him was for Sue, Lester was able to see what a stuck position he was in.

Lester needed to be very clear about what he was not saying, to overcome his feelings of vulnerability, and to change his tendency to keep his emotions unexpressed. When he did this a profound change occurred. Through a great deal of talking, Lester and Sue were able to resolve the issues and recapture some of the intimacy and closeness that was part of their early married years.

Joan (27) told me what it was like living with Trevor (26). Joan felt continually on edge. If something that she knew would upset Trevor happened, he would appear to cope well at the time, saying that everything was fine, and that it wasn't a problem. A few days or weeks later when she thought he had forgotten all about it, some minor incident would trigger Trevor's self-righteous anger and she would find herself in the middle of a full-scale attack that could be traced back to the past incident over which he had not reacted.

This behaviour was emotionally abusive because Joan had to somehow continually guess what was happening for Trevor, and try to prevent it. In this way Trevor was shifting the responsibility for his unwillingness to deal with issues in a constructive way onto Joan.

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trapped
uncertain
uncomfortable
unsure
upset
weak

F E E L I N G W O R D L I S T	Vulnerable	Angry	Scared	Strong
	ashamed	aggravated	afraid	active
	bored	annoyed	anxious	aggressive
	confused	burned up	awed	alert
	defenceless	critical	chicken	angry
	discouraged	disgusted	confused	bold
	embarrassed	enraged	fearful	brave
	exhausted	envious	frightened	capable
	fragile	exasperated	horrified	confident
	frail	fed up	insecure	determined
	frustrated	frustrated	intimidated	energetic
	guilty	fuming	jumpy	happy
	helpless	furious	lonely	healthy
	horrible	impatient	nervous	intense
	ill	indignant	panicky	loud
	impotent	irritated	shaky	loved
	inadequate	mad	shy	mean
	insecure	mean	stunned	open
	lifeless	offended	tense	positive
	lost	pissed off	terrified	potent
	overwhelmed	resentful	threatened	powerful
	powerless	riled	timid	quick
	quiet	sore	uneasy	rage
	run down	sullen	unsure	secure
	shaky		worried	solid
	shy			super
	sick			tough
	timid			
tired				
unsure				
useless				
weak				
wishy-washy				
worn out				

The hallmark of turtles is that others are left unsure and wondering what is going on. They are invited into a destructive dance where they pay the price. One woman described this as like ‘living on the edge of a volcano’.

If living with a turtle is like living on the edge of a volcano, living with sharks is like being inside the volcano. Sharks are those people who openly shift responsibility onto others by blaming them for the situation. They often start sentences with ‘You ...’:

‘You made me angry!’

‘If it wasn’t for you I wouldn’t need to get abusive.’

‘It’s your fault I’m like this!’

What sharks do is shift responsibility for the problem onto the other person and make the other person responsible for how they feel. What can start as a reasonable discussion can become more and more heated and very abusive. For sharks, winning is the end goal. Sharks will use any tactic if it helps them win. And once they get the scent of a win they won’t stop until they have achieved their goal. Look at the following list of unhelpful communication tactics:

- The use of put-downs to make another person feel bad about themselves. Examples of these are statements such as ‘You are stupid/dumb’, or, ‘How could you think like that?’
- Threatening, intimidating, ordering and demanding that a person act in certain ways or comply with one set of ideas or perception of a situation.
- Dredging up the past, which has the effect of shifting the focus off the issue at hand.
- Closing off conversation by ignoring or not responding to the issue.
- Only hearing what you want to hear and blocking out what the other person is saying.
- Point scoring, or winning at the expense of someone else. This often involves public put-downs or ridicule of the other person.
- Laying on the guilt so that the other person feels bad about themselves and something they have or have not done. Examples are criticising parenting skills or jobs done, making the person feel guilty for not being a certain way, and statements such as ‘If you loved me then you’d know I don’t like being with your family.’
- Exaggerating what has happened and blowing things out of all proportion.

If you are a shark, which of these tactics do you use?

Paul sat in a group once and said, ‘Yes, I do all of those things. I find myself in a fight and it’s like I’ll muster all the resources I can to win.’ Paul was a typical shark. He was always right and always had to have the last say. He told us that on one occasion he was having an argument with a mate of his at the hotel and he knew his information was wrong. He wasn’t prepared to back down and managed to shift the argument away from the issue and onto his mate’s inadequacies. This led to a physical confrontation in the carpark.

Paul reflected later that it was a stupid disagreement. He felt he had to save face in front of the other men who were there.

Living with sharks has a profound effect on the emotional, physical and mental health of those on the receiving end of such behaviour.

Trish said that when her partner was angry he would walk into the room and tell her ‘It’s all your fault’, and she wouldn’t even know what he was talking about. She said he would yell and scream about something every single day. Trish was living in an atmosphere of continual tension, waiting for the next outburst.

You may want to return to the Assessing the Damage section if you are a shark and remind yourself of what it is like for others.

Foxes are interesting creatures. They are more careful in their approach to a situation. They still want to win at all costs but they are more strategic and cunning. They try to take control of the situation in less obviously abusive ways than sharks, and are certainly more active than the turtle. Foxes are game players. They will set traps for people, slowly tightening their grip on the other person. They may taunt, letting people know they are around. They may surprise by turning up unexpectedly in order to catch the other person out. At the beginning of relationships they may put on sheep's clothing.

June (45) lived with a fox. She desperately wanted to go to an evening class to improve her sewing skills. Her children were at an age where they were fairly independent and could take care of themselves.

Her fox-like partner began his campaign to stop her by talking about the cost, also laying on the guilt about what he would do the two nights a week she was out. (He generally watched television and didn't interact a great deal anyway.)

He tried to further undermine her by talking about how he couldn't predict when he would need the car. When June explored alternative methods of transport, he resorted to breaking her sewing machine so that it would be a waste of time for her to attend the class.

The old blueprint for being a man which we have explored to date expects men to be dominant and controlling. If men are not in the positions of power that they have come to expect, they may resort to abusive behaviour in order to achieve a sense of power over others, be that within the home, in public or on the sports field.

Turtles, sharks and foxes all have the same thing in common — they use different methods to achieve this sense of power and control in their lives. Unfortunately the sense of power and control that they want is at others' expense.

Questions to Ponder

- What will tell or show others I am ready to share my deeper emotions with them?
- What fears will I need to overcome in order to be honest with myself about my feelings?

Knowing Ourselves

The model that the owl presents is a good one in that owls, perched high up in the trees, see the wider picture. Being a night bird, owls can see situations in a different light. That is the challenge of relating to another person, being able to see clearly what is going on for yourself and what is happening for others.

One of the blocks to achieving this is that it may feel scary to disclose what is really going on for all sorts of reasons. Some men tell me that, if they tell the other person what is going on, the other person will use it against them. I ask them if they want a relationship based on winning and losing and working against each other, or a relationship based on working together where both people win. Clearly the old ways don't work, so I invite men to give it a go. What could possibly be worse than how things have been?

Hank struggled to keep himself open to hearing issues of concern from other people, particularly his partner Maggie. Hank was challenged by Maggie to be more emotionally available, to explore how he could really understand what was going on.

Hank (23) lived with Maggie (21), who complained about how emotionally unavailable Hank was. Hank's first reaction was to ignore Maggie's concern. But ignoring didn't help as it confirmed Maggie's view that Hank was emotionally unavailable that is, he wasn't one to share his emotions with anyone. On many occasions he didn't even react to her concerns. When Hank acted this way he was at Step 1 of the disclosure ladder, stuck with a destructive and unhelpful pattern of communicating (see the diagram on page 20).

At Step 2 in the chain of awareness, Hank was aware that he did react to Maggie's comments. He was physically churned up in his stomach.

Hank's reaction to his physical response was to blame Maggie by saying 'You women are all the same; you don't understand us men, so get off my back.' Hank was aware of how angry he felt when Maggie said he was emotionally unavailable. He became self-righteous and denied that he was inexpressive, stating that other women he had been with hadn't complained. Hank had not had many previous significant relationships like the one with Maggie to have had this said, but he wasn't owning up to that.

In taking this approach (Step 3) Hank censored out Maggie's story about what was going on. He also shifted the responsibility for his issue onto Maggie, which robbed him of his own ability to find a creative response. That left Maggie either wondering if she was living in the same house with the same man or mistrusting her own perception of the situation. A typical question she asked herself was, 'Am I reading this situation correctly or imagining it?' Step 3 disclosures leave everyone feeling confused.

The next step (Step 4) for Hank was to acknowledge the link between the issue and his first level of emotion. Remember, the dominant story for men is that self-righteous anger is the 'proper response'. He was able to state that 'I feel annoyed when you criticise me for not being expressive.'

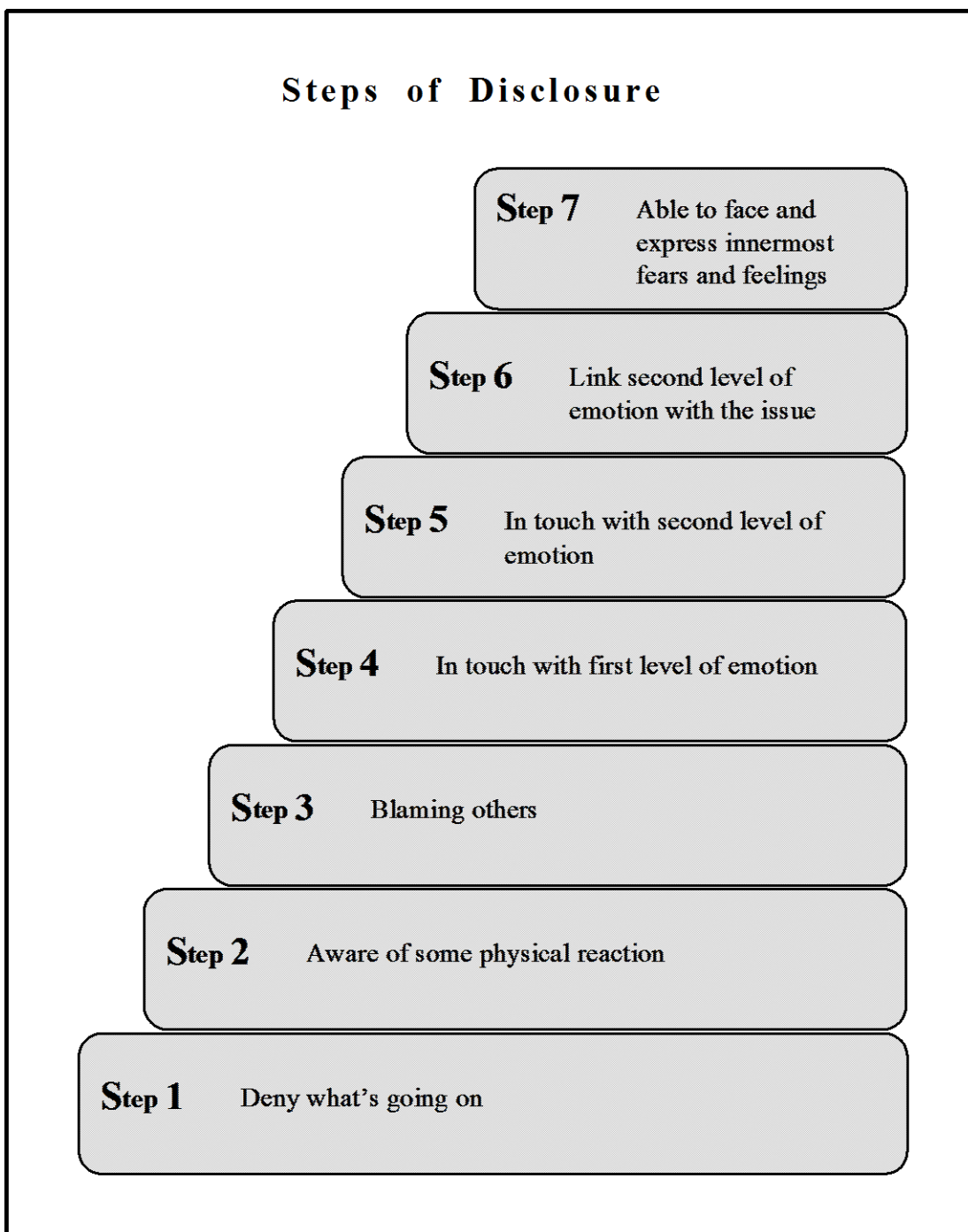
This owning, or talking from himself; was a significant step for Hank and saw him breaking his previous 'turtle-like' pattern concerning being emotional. When Hank was able to do this he was in many ways doing what Maggie was wanting all along. She wanted to know what he was thinking and feeling, not an unreasonable request in a relationship.

Hank was asked to be aware of what was underneath this self-righteous anger and blaming behaviour with the question: 'If you were to drop your mask for a moment, what do you fear most when Maggie criticises you?' This takes Hank from the dominant story to the story behind his self-righteous anger. This part of the story makes the connection between his feeling of annoyance at being criticised and his deeper levels of feelings (Step 6).

The last hurdle for Hank in communicating at a deeper level and so enhancing intimacy within the relationship, was being able to acknowledge and face his fears. Step 7 saw Hank telling Maggie that he was afraid to tell her his feelings for fear that she would not like him and leave. He was also aware of the strong messages he had picked up from the Old Rule Book which dictated that boys should not express any


feelings of vulnerability for fear others would use them against you. Hank was able to say, 'Maggie, when you criticise me for not being expressive, I feel afraid because I find it difficult. It's like I have feelings but not the words to describe what is going on. Also, in my family boys got a hard time if they acknowledged any feelings apart from being tough.'

In Hank's example there are many steps of disclosure that make up the picture. These different steps are bound up with a whole set of messages that get in the way — from denying there is a problem to having the skills to work out what is going on.



By letting Maggie into his emotional world Hank gives her better opportunity to understand him better. Hank has been responsible in being emotionally available to his partner. From here creative and exciting solutions to a problem that would have seen them going in separate directions are available. Hank would no doubt have moved into a new relationship and continued his old pattern of expressing his anger abusively.

Exercise

 Take a piece of paper and write down an issue that you are having difficulty resolving. Pick an easy one for this first practice. Using the format that I have used with Hank and relating it to the Steps of Disclosure on page 20, work out the different levels of your understanding until you get to the point where you are clear about the underlying feelings and the fears of vulnerability you feel. Work out how you will communicate this to others in a way that is respectful and honest.

I have found this a useful method for becoming more in touch with what is going on, as well as helping the process of becoming more meaningful and honest in expressing emotions. It is all too easy for men in our society to hide behind a mask, which I am convinced doesn't do them or others any good.

You will learn from this exercise that the feelings expressed are often different from those that exist at the deeper level. In order to communicate honestly with others, you will need to be aware of your inner emotional life and take time to figure out what is driving you. Otherwise you are destined to continue hiding behind a mask and you will not let others close. Besides blocking the ability to become intimate, this also blocks an understanding of ourselves. You may be confused and disappointed with how you respond to situations, and want to do better.

Peter came to one of my groups absolutely furious about his boss. He worked in a car yard and, because of the high crime rate in the area, the firm needed to fence the yard at night. Peter said he would design a fencing system and bring his plans back to the boss for perusal.

Peter went away and spent hours working it all out and costing the job. After looking at the plans and costings, Peter's boss said, 'No, it's not what I had in mind', without further explanation. Peter felt rejected and began to argue with his boss about the merits of his proposal. His boss reacted to Peter's self-righteous anger and not the issue, which was the fence.

On further exploration Peter learnt some important lessons about communication.

Firstly, he should have asked what his boss had in mind, the rough amount he was willing to spend, ideas about the type of fencing to use, and so on. This would have given Peter a foundation for a plan that was consistent with the wishes of the person who would be making the final decision and spending the money.

Secondly, Peter saw himself as a perfectionist. He had put a great deal of thought and energy into his proposal. His strong feelings of rejection were linked with his need to achieve highly and his self-esteem was tied to others acknowledging his skills.

Thirdly, Peter didn't sell his ideas to his boss. Peter was a highly successful car salesman, yet he left his plans with his boss and didn't talk his ideas through, or the costs and benefits of his proposal.

In many ways Peter set himself up for the rejection he received. It's impossible to force ideas onto others, and once Peter got angry, the issue was lost. He lost more than just the argument; he nearly lost his job into the bargain.

Questions to Ponder

- In what ways will embracing the New Rule Book add new depth to my relationships?
- In what ways will being more in touch with my emotional life add to a more intimate and fulfilling relationship with others?
- What problems might it bring?

Summary

In this chapter we have explored the New Rule Book, particularly with regard to the Respect Test. We have also explored the ways that men tend to handle feelings. We have seen how these ways are not helpful and contribute only to abusive and disrespectful ways of relating to others. I have also challenged you about the need to be honest and clear about your own thoughts and feelings. I have invited you to stop being a turtle, shark or fox, and embrace an owl-like approach to life.

By now you are well on the way to embracing a non-abusive lifestyle in which anger has an important and useful place. Self-righteous anger only gets in the way. Taking on new behaviours, beliefs and energy for this New Rule Book may leave you feeling daunted by what is involved. But don't despair; behaviours don't change overnight. It is a continual process of working on behaviour, beliefs and feelings that invites new and exciting relationships with others. In the next chapter we will continue with more skills for living a non-abusive lifestyle.