

PART ONE

---

# The Self-Coaching Phase

Working without  
Your Partner



# 1

## Can I Really Save My Relationship?

### Becoming a Catalyst

**Catalyst:** *an agent that causes change or action*

Suffering without hope is intolerable. Sometimes after hours, in the quiet of my office, I can still hear the anguished voices:

“Don’t you realize that your need to watch porn every time we make love makes me feel so cheap? I feel rejected when you watch other women. Don’t I turn you on anymore?”

“Stop pretending there’s no problem. You can’t even look at me anymore. It feels like we’re on different planets, different worlds apart . . . What happened to us? Is it me? I just don’t understand.”

“You’ve become so nasty; you’re not the person I married. I honestly think you hate me. I can’t go on feeling this miserable.”

“How could you do this to me? How could you sleep with her? Obviously you have no respect for me or our relationship. Believe me, if I had a gun in my hand right now, I think I would use it on you! Or her!”

"I'm so confused. I just don't know if I love you anymore. Maybe a separation would help. It's not that I don't care about you . . . I just need time. I can't take the constant bickering . . . I just can't take it. I'm sorry . . . so sorry. It's not you, it's me."

All of these statements came from couples I've counseled, and, as you might suspect, they represent a small fraction of the different notes that make up the sad song of relationship chaos. Since you're reading this book, you too are probably suffering and looking for relief. I wrote this book to give you hope. But hope by itself is too passive, too uncertain . . . so, more than hope, this is a book about change. Positive change.

If you've ever felt like any of the patients quoted above, or whatever concerns you may have about your relationship—however confused, bogged down, or distraught you may feel at this moment—I want you to know that there's a realistic solution: a Catalytic Self-Coaching solution that doesn't require anything more than an open mind and a willingness to explore the riddle that your relationship has become.

So if you're in a problem relationship—one that's slipping, becoming more troubled, less loving, and more confused—I have one question for you: how come you're the one reading this book and not your partner? Don't make any excuses; the simple truth is that *you're* the one who decided to do something about your struggling relationship. Not your partner. And you are the reason I wrote this book. Sure, in a better world, it would be great if you *and* your partner would share the responsibility for change. But in the real world, most struggling relationships become asymmetrical; one partner becomes the problem solver and the other the problem avoider. (You may be tempted to see your partner as the "problem maker," but for now, try to suspend this belief until we discuss the dynamics of your relationship.) Since you're doing the reading right now, let's designate you as the problem solver. And if your partner isn't happy with this designation, then by all means share the book—having two problem solvers in one relationship is great. But as you're about to find out, it's not a necessity either!

From the start, let's face one undeniable law of relating: struggle does not take place in a vacuum. Every struggle involves two partners with two unique perceptions. And every solution includes two partners with

one shared perception. This book makes no claim that you can fix or change your partner; only your partner can do that. What I can promise is that you can become a catalyst for getting your less than cooperative partner to join you in a meaningful healing process, even if you have to start this process alone.

As I mentioned earlier, if you're reading this book, chances are you've voluntarily assigned yourself the role of problem solver. If you're willing to accept this as a necessary, albeit temporary, burden, then this book can help. But don't look at this undertaking as a burden. Instead, try to see it as an attempt to protect your investment. Whatever your reason—whether it's children, years together, shared assets, pets, or fear of dissolving the relationship and facing the unknown—I think you'll agree that you have much more to gain if things work out than if they don't. And let's face it, does it really matter who initiates the process if in fact you wind up reclaiming the love you've lost? It's not a contest, it's your life.

## Pain: The Bright Side

Although your situation is unique, all relationship struggles have one thing in common: pain. It doesn't matter if you're feeling unloved, unable to love, abused, neglected, or just plain confused—pain is pain! And it stinks! But there is a bright side; pain can be a great motivator. Whether it's going to the dentist to finally get that long-needed root canal taken care of or spending the money to replace those worn-out running shoes that leave you limping after every workout, pain instigates change.

### Misconception 1: In a Struggling Relationship, Only One Partner Suffers

You might assume that since you're the only one who actually wants to do anything to save your relationship, at least for the moment, you must be suffering more than your partner. Not true. Just because your partner may not be showing any outward signs of pain or distress, don't think there isn't a fire burning in the cellar.

It's not unusual for a struggling partner to bury his or her feelings in insulating-avoidant behavior. This can include emotional withdrawal, excessive diversion (TV, compulsive hobbies, and so on), flirtations and affairs, overeating, substance abuse, workaholism—in fact, just about anything that masks the pain and conflict by creating a buffer of distraction or distance. For other partners, the problem isn't avoidance. It's violence. The flip side of avoidant behavior is hostile-aggressive behavior. This category includes such distasteful behavior as yelling, nastiness, obnoxiousness, physical and psychological abuse, passive aggressiveness, and demeaning, hurtful personality attacks.

Whether it's aggressive or passive, avoidant or insulating, the motor that drives this shabby behavior is pain. Although you and your partner may experience and express your pain differently, in a stumbling relationship, no one is spared. Pain is an equal-opportunity experience.

## Misconception 2: You're Unloved

Another equally common misconception is that an uncooperative, seemingly unaffected, avoidant, or aggressive partner doesn't love you. (I'll be defining love in a later chapter.) Although some behavior, such as aloofness, lack of concern, or any form of hostility, may leave you convinced that things are hopeless, this may be far from the truth. Avoidant and aggressive behavior typically has nothing to do with lack of love and everything to do with your partner's attempts to sidestep vulnerability. Let's face it, if instead of being loved you expect to be rejected, you're going to do what comes naturally—protect yourself. It's human nature. You are not going to risk the emotional vulnerability inherent in loving if you don't feel safe. Neither is your partner.

## Control: The Bottom Line

Understanding your relationship struggle doesn't need to be complicated, not when you are able to identify the root of all strife. The driving biological forces in nature are said to be the avoidance of pain and the seeking of pleasure. I'd like to add another equally compelling drive to this

list: we humans abhor losing control and do whatever we can to regain it. From the time we are infants, we meet chaos with a reactive attempt to control the situation. The Moro reflex, which is present for a brief period after birth, demonstrates this natural instinct. If an infant falls rapidly, the child's arms and legs will mimic the grasping response of a young monkey clinging to its mother as she climbs through the trees. From an evolutionary standpoint, this is known as a vestigial behavior pattern—one that reflects our evolutionary past. From our first moments on earth, we have instinctively responded to danger by protecting ourselves from harm and trying to regain control.

I mention all this so you can understand the powerful forces at work when people feel threatened. Whether the threat is real or imagined makes no difference. If you *feel* threatened, abandoned, neglected, or unloved, you will do what comes naturally—you will try to gain control over those chaotic feelings. Sometimes you may do it constructively by talking, discussing, and trying to resolve the problem. Sometimes you may do it destructively, by avoiding, attacking, or otherwise protecting yourself from perceived harm. Destructive or constructive, you're only trying to feel less out of control.

When there's turbulence in a relationship, each partner tries reflexively to regain some control over the floundering situation. Every relationship struggle reflects some combination of three basic controlling strategies. Depending on the degree of security or insecurity, each partner will adopt one of these reactions:

1. **Constructive.** Trying to talk, understand, or get some help.
2. **Avoidant.** Retreating into a turtle shell of protection and avoidance.
3. **Aggressive.** Becoming hostile and aggressive: "If I push you away, you can't hurt me."

The optimum approach for resolving problems and reclaiming love is for both partners to be constructive—a constructive-constructive approach. A mutually constructive approach is the eventual goal of this book. Unfortunately, we don't always begin with the optimum.

When neither partner can be constructive, and instead both of them wind up embroiled in patterns of avoidance or aggression, they're more

likely to find themselves talking to a divorce lawyer than to each other. Why? Because in these three defensive combinations, avoidant-avoidant, avoidant-aggressive, aggressive-aggressive, there's very little room for healing. Both partners are backed into their mutually exclusive corners, shielding themselves from harm and clearly not able to trust or love.

When at least one partner takes a constructive, Catalytic Self-Coaching approach, even if the other one is aggressive or avoidant, a positive resolution is not only possible, it's likely. I come back to you, the designated problem solver, or, as I'll begin referring to you throughout the book, the *catalytic partner*. Since you're doing the reading, then by definition, you are engaging in a constructive approach. Regardless of your partner's attitude, as long as you are employing a constructive approach, Catalytic Self-Coaching becomes an option.

## Eyes Wide Open: Seeing Both Sides

In over thirty years of working with couples, I've seen time and again that there are always two sides to a story. I can't think of a time when one partner came into a session admitting, "It's all my fault. I'm a terrible, uncaring lout and I'm the sole reason we're having trouble!" Stop thinking that your job is to show your partner the proverbial light, the truth, or the reality. Instead, start recognizing that there are two lights, two truths, and yes, two realities.

I can hear you now: "What, are you saying I should excuse my husband's rotten, obnoxious behavior?" No, not excuse it, but you will need to understand it; just as your obnoxious husband might need to understand why you're less than receptive to his romantic overtures. From this point on, don't judge your partner's behavior by what you see or feel; try instead to recognize that what motivates and drives destructive behavior is the instinctual attempt to gain control. Another way of saying this is that you need to know that your partner—for whatever reason—is feeling out of control and just doing what comes naturally: defensively trying to survive.

I'm reminded of a TV set we had when I was a child. It had a two-inch screen (this was an early 1950s vintage set) with a four-inch magnifying



glass. Although the magnifying glass gave you a more expansive view, it also distorted the images. This is what happens with defensiveness. You may think you're seeing the bigger, clearer picture, when in fact what you're seeing isn't accurate, it's a distorted view. Only by removing defensiveness, which like my TV has a magnifying and distorting effect on your problems, can you begin to start seeing the real picture. At first you may be squinting to see what's going on, but in time, without distortion, you'll move up to a sixty-inch, widescreen view of what needs to be done.

## Why Is Change So Hard?

Newton's first law of motion states that objects at rest tend to stay at rest and objects in motion tend to stay in motion. In other words, objects—and people—tend to keep on doing what they're doing. The tendency to resist change, or inertia, is completely natural. Since you're in a struggling relationship, no one has to tell you the meaning of the word *stuck*. Being stuck is having relationship inertia.

Let's cut to the chase. This is a book about change, about overcoming your relationship inertia with or without your partner's help. There are many reasons why people change. I'm sure you've known people who have lost weight, stopped smoking, started exercising, and become better partners; people who have actually changed. I'm equally sure you know people who have plodded along in endless ruts of "I just can't lose weight," "I don't follow through on my exercise," or "My wife and I haven't had sex in five years." For over thirty years it's been my job to figure out why some relationships thrive and become lifelong successes, while others are filled with personal unhappiness, inadequate communication, faulty perceptions, and broken hearts. Why do some people manage to change while others don't? What's the secret? The secret is that there is no secret. But as with any riddle, if you can't see the solution, can't understand it or employ it, it might as well be a secret.

If you're about to become the catalyst for change in your relationship, you're going to have to answer this riddle. I'm going to show you how

to do that by teaching you why people change, what specifically in your relationship has to be changed, and how you can use coaching to achieve change. Understand these three components of change—the why, what, and how—and you’ll be in a position to do some serious coaching. The *what* and the *how* of changing your relationship will be dealt with extensively in upcoming chapters. For now, I’ll begin your Catalytic Self-Coaching education by introducing you to *why* people change.

## Why People Change

People and computers share many similarities. One of them is related to what in the computer world are called cookies. A cookie is a small file that a Web site embeds in your computer to store information about you (such as Web pages you’ve visited, items you’ve put into an online shopping cart, your user name, password, and so on). The Web site retrieves this information to identify you (or your preferences) in the future. Essentially, your computer gets to know your Web browsing habits and learns to anticipate your Internet behavior. This is efficient.

Like computers with embedded cookies, humans are programmed with biological cookies called habits. The ability to form habits is a valuable part of our human programming that allows us to become more efficient organisms. When we do something long enough, we begin to shift from intentional behavior to a more automatic, reflexive kind of behavior. If you want to see a demonstration of this phenomenon, reach down and tie your shoe. Your hands tie the knot with practiced precision and speed; this is habit.

Habits serve us in many ways. For one, they make us more efficient. Imagine if every time you bent over to tie your shoe you had to think about which hand crosses over the other. Whether you’re driving a car, touch-typing at a computer, or even walking up or down steps, your habits allow you to move and flow more easily through your life. Habits can be helpful, but they can also cause problems. Overeating, gambling, insecurity, worry, obnoxiousness, stubbornness, and defensiveness are also habits, habits that can alter the course of your life and your relationships.

The problem with changing any habit is that the change usually causes some degree of discomfort. When we depart from the familiar we enter a world of uncertainty, frustration, or even fear. If you want to feel some frustration, try switching your hands the next time you tie your shoe, comb your hair, or brush your teeth. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that human beings like feeling in control. Since change entails a departure from behavior that has become comfortable and familiar—but not necessarily constructive—it's not uncommon to feel an initial loss of control with these efforts, at least until the new behavior is acquired. In order for someone to want to leave their comfort zone and accept any loss of control, there needs to be enough of an incentive.

Think of it as a tipping point. When the incentive-energy becomes greater than the inertia-energy, change occurs. In a relationship, for example, if your partner feels that being more open and expressive is going to be well received (incentive-energy), there's a likelihood that change will be considered. If, on the other hand, your partner feels that opening up and being more expressive might be used against him or her (inertia-energy), the likelihood of change is minimal. The formula looks like this:

Incentive-energy > inertia-energy = change

Inertia-energy > incentive-energy = no change

It all boils down to your partner asking, "Why risk change if the payoff isn't worth it?" The operative word here is *risk*. In most situations, change entails a willingness to embrace risk. In order for you to convince your partner to risk change, you're going to have to demonstrate that:

- There is a high probability that change will improve the situation.
- Change is realistic and obtainable.
- The risk involved in change is acceptable.

Since humans are survival machines, your partner is not going to lower his or her defenses without first feeling sure of surviving the proposed change. It's common sense. We change when we feel we have a legitimate chance of success, or a better life, or the prospect of becoming happier. We don't change when we feel this is unlikely or too risky.

## The Go, No-Go Threshold

Everyone has a threshold for change, which depends on the severity of one's insecurity. It's a kind of go, no-go point, at which a shift from inertia to action can occur. I'm reminded of a water-propelled plastic rocket I had when I was a kid. You filled the rocket with water and then attached a hand pump to the nozzle at the base of the rocket. Then, depending on your tolerance, impatience, or desire to break a world record, you began pumping—ten times, twenty times, thirty. At some arbitrary point you made a decision to blast off. That's when you stopped pumping and released the lever that held the rocket to the pump. *Whoosh!* The rocket would climb to the incredible height of five hundred feet! It's the same with relationship change. You pump in incentives for change; you pump, pump, pump until at some point you're able to convince your partner to release the inertia and *whoosh!*

Everyone has a personal go, no-go threshold. For some the degree of confidence necessary to get to a go threshold may be minimal (if you are in a relationship with a relatively secure partner that has had only minor struggle). For others the go threshold may be excessively high (in a relationship where there is significant insecurity, depression, or anxiety along with a major struggle). Regardless of your partner's go threshold, the good news is that if you pump enough confidence, incentive, and optimism into a struggling relationship, all the while building trust, the vast majority of people will get to a point where the risk of releasing their grip on inertia becomes not only possible, but likely. *Whoosh!*

## Self-Coaching for Couples

Although I had developed and used my Self-Coaching techniques with my individual patients for years, I didn't realize that these same techniques had found their way into my sessions with couples. It happened inadvertently because I had been thinking of *Self-Coaching* primarily as a tool for individuals, not couples. I had been overlooking the obvious fact that couples are, by definition, two individuals—two individuals combining to form an “Us.” As the kids say, “Duh.”

I began to realize that as helpful as individual Self-Coaching was, something more was needed to bridge the gap between the “Self component” (each partner’s limitations) and the “Us component” (the relationship dynamic) inherent in every relationship. I needed a one-two punch. I already had my first punch in the form of Self-Coaching, which could get me beyond the personality limitations of each partner. What I needed to develop was a second punch that could apply the insights gained from Self-Coaching interactively.

## The Catalytic Solution

In high school chemistry I learned that an agent that facilitates or stimulates a chemical interaction is called a catalyst. In an out-of-balance relationship, I observed the same thing. One partner, by conscientiously working on his or her own Self-Coaching evolution, was enough to become a catalyst, stimulating change within the relationship. This observation was the genesis of my Catalytic Self-Coaching program: recognizing that Self-Coaching—which encourages each partner to take personal responsibility for any personal limitations imposed by habits of insecurity—is part of a continuum that starts with individuals and ends with couples. Essentially the difference can be stated as follows: Self-Coaching will enable you to heal, motivate, inspire, educate, and change yourself, while Catalytic Self-Coaching will enable you and your partner to heal, motivate, inspire, educate, and change your relationship.

From the start, it’s important to understand that successful Catalytic Self-Coaching depends on a solid and reliable base of *Self-Coaching*. By establishing a solid Self-Coaching foundation, you and your partner will be in a position to launch your catalytic coaching efforts to address all struggle, all friction, and all confusion—often with startling and enduring results. Keep in mind that any approach that focuses solely on the interaction—the *Us*-component—without a strong foundation of individual Self-Coaching is doomed to wind up reverting back to each partner’s weakest link (that is, limitations imposed by personal habits of insecurity). Changing the interactive dynamic alone does not change the individual habits of insecurity and control that feed the problems.

These habits will eventually overtake your efforts, leaving you once again repeating old struggles.

If you're convinced that approaching your difficulties from the ground up makes sense, then you're ready to throw the first Self-Coaching punch. However, you still have one significant problem—your reluctant partner may not be ready. With a reluctant partner, the challenge is not unlike my efforts to apply Self-Coaching with a depressed patient. Typically with depression there is a shutting down and withdrawal of energy. The key in working with depression (or for you, working with a partner who has withdrawn energy and enthusiasm) is to initiate a counterforce to the inertia. Initially, in my office practice, this counterforce comes from me. I need to become the legitimate voice of encouragement, capable of generating that energy and enthusiasm. Someone has to *know*—and convey—that psychological friction is unacceptable and that, whatever it takes, success must be demanded. No ifs, ands, or buts! This is what a coach does, and this is what you can do for your reluctant partner.

Because you're dealing with a reluctant partner, by default, you're going to be the one who puts things in motion. Your process begins with your own Self-Coaching as you learn to remove any personal blinders imposed by issues of insecurity and control. Your liberated, nondefensive, expanded perspective will allow you to neutralize resistance in the relationship by unilaterally lessening the friction. It's this shift in the relationship equilibrium that will put you in a position to initiate some Catalytic Self-Coaching.

Okay, time out. I can already hear you asking, "Why do I always have to take the first step?" If you recall from our earlier discussion, you're taking the first step not just because you're the designated catalytic partner, but because you've decided that you have more to gain by making this relationship work than by allowing it to atrophy or, worse, to dissolve. So, take a breath, resist the temptation to feel victimized by your challenge, and instead begin to feel the ripples of empowerment as you recognize that what you're really doing is deciding not to be a victim. You're putting your future in your own hands. How can this not be positive?

From the start it's important for you to be realistic about changing a stagnant or floundering relationship. At first you may feel disappointed if your partner doesn't jump on the bandwagon. Just because you're seeing

things more clearly, don't expect the same from your partner. On the other hand, don't be disheartened with resistance either. Try to remind yourself that everyone wants to be happy and no one wants to struggle. Reluctance doesn't happen because someone prefers being stubborn, it happens because the love in your relationship has been inhibited by fear, hopelessness, or frustration. In chemistry, the opposite of a catalyst is an inhibitor.

## What Exactly Constitutes a Reluctant Partner?

Before going on, I should point out that the term *reluctant partner* doesn't just include a partner struggling with relationship issues. Sometimes, because of depression or anxiety, a partner is limited in his or her ability to relate meaningfully. Since Self-Coaching originated as a tool to heal anxiety and depression, you will find that whatever the reluctance, the Self-Coaching component of your program is capable of addressing these issues. I therefore use the term *reluctant partner* to encompass any and all hesitations. Whether these are relationship-specific issues (avoidance or aggressive behavior) or personal limitations of your partner (depression, anxiety, and so forth), Catalytic Self-Coaching can help.

Sometimes good intentions, couples counseling, and self-help efforts can all wind up falling short of saving a relationship. Why are some relationships so resistant to healing? One doesn't have to look far for the reason. In any relationship, the potential for any legitimate healing is only as good as its weakest link. If you or your partner suffer from psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, panic, or other control-related limitations such as obsessive concerns, ruminative fears, or habituated insecurity, there's no getting around the fact that if your relationship is going to succeed, you or your partner *must* be healed before your relationship can be healed.

You hold in your hands a proven program that is able not only to address relationship frictions, but to dismantle the deeper, underlying reasons why relationships fail—individual psychological limitations. It is this capacity for personal as well as relationship healing that sets Catalytic

Self-Coaching apart from any other approach. And it is why, from the very beginning, you need to know why it's okay to risk being optimistic.

My claims may sound rather grandiose, but that's because you're probably used to seeing relationship problems and personal limitations as unrelated. They're not. If you recall, I mentioned that control was the bottom line. Once you recognize that struggle—all struggle, personal or relational—has to do with habits of control, you'll begin to understand why this isn't a frivolous claim. As you'll see in upcoming chapters, the solution isn't dependent on years of retrospective analysis or elusive insights; it's this simple notion that your problems—personal or relational—are nothing more than habits. Bad habits of control. And when it comes to habits, you're either feeding them or starving them.

## When the Direct Approach Fails

Just as a good coach will get an athlete to overcome fear and hesitation with a good pep talk, you will learn how to inspire your partner to challenge hesitations. Unfortunately, as you're probably well aware, the direct approach doesn't always work. When your partner tunes you out and ignores your pleas for a constructive dialogue, your typical strategies may leave you scratching your head, frustrated and depressed. This is where you'll find that a bit of relationship jujitsu is just the ticket for disarming your partner's resistance. Sometimes, as you'll see in a moment with Karen and Sal, less is definitely more.

Let us assume that you've tried a frontal assault on your relationship problem, only to be met by a stone wall of resistance. You'll find that your Self-Coaching efforts will begin to reduce this resistance by removing any fears that your partner may have that you will do harm—by not loving, by rejecting, by abusing, and so forth. Self-Coaching will teach you to no longer be part of the destructive, reflexive dance that has defined your relationship until now. Once this happens, your partner will begin to experience a shift, a lessening of the friction that has been so chronic. Although this absence of friction may cause a momentary pause in hostilities, it won't necessarily produce any positive changes. But it will provide the fertile soil in which the seeds of change can take root.



As things begin to quiet down, the transition from Self-Coaching to Catalytic Self-Coaching begins. The insights you've gained from your Self-Coaching efforts will make it easier for you to transcend your own former blind spots, while putting you in a position to recognize and understand the *real* problems. It's this awareness that will allow you to initiate the process of getting your partner to join you in your coaching efforts.

Karen and Sal's relationship is a good example of what happens to a struggle when only one partner participates. Remove yourself from your struggle and your partner will respond. As you'll see from this condensed version of their therapy, Karen's Self-Coaching paid off.

## Karen and Sal

Karen couldn't convince her husband to join her, so she came to our first session alone. She told me, "Sal's never home to attend to our family. He's in a world of his own. It's as if he doesn't hear me. I feel like I'm invisible. I'm always asking him to help out around the house, to fix the light switch in the kitchen, help with the kids' baths, normal stuff. He's so self-absorbed—he keeps saying it's my problem. That's why he wouldn't come to therapy. I don't know if he's just plain lazy or if he just doesn't care. If only he would help out. I can't help but nag at him."

You might think that Karen's dilemma is rather simple—she's married to a selfish, lazy, uncaring husband. Although this was clearly a part of her problem, it wasn't the whole problem. With some Self-Coaching, Karen was able to recognize that she was, in fact, someone who needed to be in control. At first she was very defensive about admitting that she was an all-the-ducks-in-a-row kind of person. "I don't think there's anything wrong with wanting to get things done around the house or to have a little help. Do you?" "No," I answered, "I don't think there's anything wrong with wanting to be in control, but there is a but. If control is driven by insecurity then it's more of a *have to* be in control than a *want to*." Karen readily conceded that she was rather compulsive about getting things done. If she noticed something that needed attention in the house, it would torment her until it was fixed. For her, it was like a hangnail. This compulsion is why she "nagged" Sal.

Working on her insecurity, Karen was able to recognize that she was living a black-and-white existence with little room for gray. Everything was in its place or everything was chaos; for Karen there was no in between. As she began to understand that her compulsive need for control was merely a habit of insecurity (more about this in later chapters), which she inadvertently reinforced by demanding control, she was able to see that there was a bigger picture. Sal didn't share her compulsive need for order, nor could he be expected to respond well to her nagging.

Karen began to work on starving her habits of insecurity. Her main task was to begin to be less rigid and inflexible, and to see this issue not as a marital issue but a Karen issue. Her Self-Coaching had a dramatic effect on Sal. At first he was suspicious as he asked, "Why are you being so casual about things? What are you and that doctor up to?" As Sal began to realize that Karen's shift wasn't a flash in the pan, he began to let down his guard. One night he said to her, "You mentioned that Dr. Luciani had offered to see us together. I was thinking that maybe I'd join you this week for your session." Bingo!

As you might expect, Sal saw things very differently from Karen. At our session he informed me, "I travel two or three days a week, and when I come home I'm exhausted. I ignore her because I'm too tired to fight. The last few weeks have been strange. Karen seems calmer. She's not on my case like she was." I asked Sal what effect this had on him. He answered, "Well, at first I thought it was a trap, you know, like she was setting me up for something. But things just kept getting better. I have to admit, it got my attention. I found myself turning off the TV the other night and fixing that light switch she had asked me to fix. I actually wanted to do something for her." As we got into Sal's feelings a bit more deeply, he confessed, "Karen's nagging has always made me feel defensive. If I did what she wanted all the time then she would win and I'd lose. Maybe it was a competitive thing with me, but I gotta tell you, the more she nagged the more I tuned her out."

As you can see, Karen started the ball rolling with her Self-Coaching efforts, which had the effect of disarming Sal and encouraging him to engage in rather than avoid solving the problem. I'm not going to go into the catalytic process that began once Sal became part of our sessions, but suffice it to say that things became not only manageable, they became

effortless. The expanded view provided by understanding each other's habits of insecurity was the catalyst for change, both individually as well as for the relationship.

## Demonstrating Change

Catalytic Self-Coaching is the way you give your partner a stimulus for wanting to change. Although there are infinite possibilities, the best place to start—since you are the relationship healer—is for you to demonstrate your own Self-Coaching success and enthusiasm. Trust me, there's no better marketing tool than success. Your first job is going to be to challenge your own personal inertia, and once you begin to pick up some momentum, you'll be in a position to spread the wealth.

## Looking Ahead

In the next chapter we're going to explore the nuts and bolts of relationship struggle. From this foundation you will begin to lay out your Self-Coaching training program. As you use Self-Coaching to eliminate your relationship-destructive habits, you'll be ready to challenge that problem-avoider partner of yours and begin the process of Catalytic Self-Coaching.

