

Prologue

*The first prerequisite of intimacy is to be intimate with oneself.
As long as we are looking outside ourselves for intimacy,
we will never have it and we will never be able to give it.
In order to be intimate with another person,
we have to know who we are, what we feel, what we think,
what our values are, what is important to us, and what we want.
If we do not know these things about ourselves,
we can never share them with another person.*

*"Escape from Intimacy,"
~ Anne Wilson Schaef*

We all have stories to tell of our personal life journeys. Some of us would share relatively simple tales, while others could recount book-worthy sagas filled with adventure and excitement—or heartbreak and pain. Some of us make good and wise decisions that deliver a peaceful soul and a life filled with contentment and happiness; others make poor choices and live with pain and regret.

If we live long enough, our stories include pivotal events—both good and bad—that may have led us on a path to finding our purpose in life. Some find that calling early in life, while others take decades. Some are fortunate to find inner peace and enlightenment with ease, while others sink to an emotional abyss before gaining a sense of truth and clarity.

Each important decision we make helps shape our path as we travel along the journey of life. The quality of our experiences during the journey—and even more importantly, our perceptions of those experiences—contribute to forming our best qualities and our least desirable traits.

Here and there, we experience negative events. If such events make a strong enough impact, they can create emotional wounds. Lasting wounds manifest as fears, self-limiting beliefs, and negative behavior habits. Each of those elements, in turn, influences the overall health of our relationships. Also, regardless of which path we take, we will inevitably reach new bridges—or new sets of decisions to make. Therefore, at each juncture, the decisions we make create our fate until we arrive at the next bridge.

The Journey from "I-TO-WE"

My life choices led me on a path from self-destruction to self-empowerment. I traveled through the darkness until I left my emotional bunker of pain and anguish. Once free, I found the healing light of awareness and love that I now treasure.

My journey ultimately led me to become a relationship coach. From that perspective, I created my first book. *The Journey from "I-TO-WE"* is the culmination of my life experiences through loss and despair, shame and humiliation, and the glorious process of awakening, learning, healing and spiritual fulfillment. With everything I have learned, it is my honor, privilege, and passion to help individuals and couples create relationships filled with safety, trust, respect, friendship, passion, and love.

I have long held a deep belief that every experience happened for a reason. As I reflect upon my life, I appreciate the process of cause and effect—how one painful or tragic event influenced another, leading me to the point I am at today.

I begin my story in May, 1994, when I sold my pharmacy business. My career started early. As a boy, I worked in my father's drugstore. I graduated college with a pharmacy degree and joined my father in managing our family-owned chain of stores. Pharmacy can be a rewarding profession, but it was not my passion and purpose. When I sold my business, I was happy to be moving into a new phase of life. I could never have imagined what the next 12 years would bring.

In January 1995, my wife and I separated. We divorced one year later, and I found myself a single father of a 3-year-old son. While my ex-wife and I have remained friends and loving parents, I take responsibility for what I contributed to the failure of my marriage.

While married, I was living in denial. Unfortunately for my wife, I didn't know anything about the concept of emotional wounds, the fears they produce and the reactivity that follows. I most certainly didn't have any awareness of the hurt and fear that I carried around. In fact, it would take many years of experience for me to understand how they impacted my life as well as the effect they had on those close to me. Only then could I begin the process of change.

In the years that followed, I danced on the edge of financial ruin. I suffered through the sudden and tragic death of my little brother. From receiving a DUI to undergoing major back surgery, I was a mess. I experienced a broken engagement and other failed relationships. I lost my father after two years fighting pancreatic cancer and watched him peacefully pass away in his bed. Forced to

The Journey from "I-TO-WE"

sell my home, I moved several times and three times changed careers.

During those years of chaos and turmoil, I experienced a long, tragic, and painful journey. I inflicted enormous pain on myself as I battled inner demons. I lived frozen in the grips of fear, continuing to make poor decisions, acting as a victim and wallowing in self-pity. I masked my feelings as an effort to disguise the insecurity, humiliation, embarrassment, and shame that I carried in my heart and soul everyday.

I recall many nights crying when alone or while next to my son as he slept. I was emotionally unavailable for my son during this time. I remember one night he asked me to play and I told him to play by himself. I vividly remember the look of sadness and disappointment on his face as he walked back to his room. I knew at the time I was hurting him, but I was frozen and could not be there for him. I numbed my pain with cigarettes and alcohol. I grew increasingly lonely and isolative as I hid myself behind a thick shield of denial.

During that period, I found myself sinking deeper and deeper into an emotional abyss. I realized that I had three choices. One, I could give up and jump in. Two, I could allow myself to continue living my life in fear on the ledge. Three, I could choose to summon my strength and courage, grab the flashlight, and find the ladder that would lead me out of the darkness and despair. Fortunately for my family and myself, I made the choice to climb the ladder towards the light of hope with a positive belief for the future.

Despite the duration and intensity of my painful experiences, I maintained an unshakable belief that I was destined for something larger than myself. A gut feeling assured me that I would find the purpose and meaning behind my struggles. In essence, I believed God was leading me on this journey to gain insight, wisdom, and truth. I knew in my soul that if I somehow maintained faith in that destiny, the path would lead me to my true life purpose.

I began to climb the ladder when I experienced a life altering epiphany on a sunny July afternoon. I was sitting on the screened porch of my home, watching the ducks swimming in the pond in my backyard. Out of nowhere a powerful awakening surged through my mind and spirit. Poised at the brink of change, I realized that something must shift, and I was the only one to make it happen.

I began my spiritual journey by reading Tony Robbins's book, *Awaken the Giant Within*. Leaving an enormous influence on my thinking, his words opened my eyes to personal awareness, controlling the mind, having a positive attitude, and taking absolute

The Journey from "I-TO-WE"

personal responsibility for my words, actions, and behaviors. The book also introduced me to the concept of coaching.

As I embarked on my journey, I knew that anything was possible. I became inspired to find answers. I would determine my purpose in life. I would leave the abyss, never to return. In effect, the awareness that I must begin to change crystallized in my mind. So I asked myself these three questions:

- What am I doing that causes my relationships to fail?
- What am I doing that causes failure in my careers?
- What am I doing that causes so much turmoil within myself?

Nine months of deep soul searching passed before I began to find the answers. Coincidentally, all these discoveries were taking place at the same time I was trying to navigate a chaotic and painful personal relationship. I began to understand that I had to take personal responsibility in order to learn and grow from this traumatic experience. Consequently, I initiated a feverish process of self-education and personal improvement. I read every book I could find on the subject of relationships. I attended workshops and seminars. I committed myself to massive action.

You have probably heard at least one person tell the story of a "defining moment" in their life. On another sunny day in July, one year after my first awakening, I was walking along the beach when the second epiphany happened. I have no idea why or how, but I suddenly emerged from my protective bunker. After years of darkness, I was present and finally, I saw the beauty of the world and felt free to love others and myself. At that point, peace enveloped my soul.

I realized that I had been living in denial. I had allowed my mind to hold me hostage through fear and pain. While hiding in my bunker, I had been wallowing in self-pity. I had blamed all kinds of events, people, and circumstances for my pain. I had viewed myself as a helpless victim.

To initiate the process of change, I gradually broke through years of defensiveness and denial. I crumbled and became humbled. I understood my emotional wounds. I released my fears and became mentally present and emotionally available. I saw the truth and took absolute personal responsibility. Most significantly, I began to forgive myself for my past choices and behaviors. I recognized that I had hit rock bottom. I knew the only direction left to go was *up*.

The Journey from "I-TO-WE"

To reach the top, I would allow love into my personal life and pursue my professional passion. Ever since I was a kid, I've felt a deep-down desire to make a positive impact on the world. Even in the darkest moments I quietly believed that my turmoil and suffering were happening for a reason. I knew God was preparing me for something. At last, my purpose was becoming clear.

When I listened to my inner voice for the first time, I knew I was to become a *relationship coach*. I would use my experiences to help people achieve and enjoy successful relationships with others and within themselves.

In coaching individuals and couples, I determined that I needed a structure that would guide them through the various issues that arose. Vaguely, I had considered writing a book, but my vision for it was not yet clear.

One day, as I was teaching a couple about communication techniques, I enjoyed another "ah-ha" moment. The idea came that I would create a highly personal and practical guide complete with tools to effect massive change in life. By drawing upon my research, personal life, and professional coaching experiences, I would facilitate a couple's exploration. Ultimately, each partner would master an understanding of his or her **I** in order to begin their journey **TO** a successful **WE**.

I wrote this book with a storm of passion and dedication. From the moment I began writing, I could not stop. For one year, I worked 14 hours a day. My subconscious often woke me at 3:30 am. I'd run to the computer to record my ideas. Time and again, I sat at my dining room table working before daybreak until late into the evening!

Well before publication, the title and the cover image came to mind. I was writing a guide on the journey towards safety, trust, respect, friendship, passion, and love when I envisioned a bridge leading to a field of sunflowers. That vision seemed to depict the beautiful safe haven of a relationship.

In July of 2006, the first edition of *The Journey from "I-TO-WE"* was published. From there, it began to take on a life of its own. The process has created a powerful and positive transformation in my life. In enabling couples to co-create happiness, the book and workbook have ignited my passion to continue my work while spreading awareness of my program that guides couples towards relationship success.

The Journey from "I-TO-WE"

The 2nd edition is vastly different from the first. The first edition was a combination book and workbook. In April of 2007, I decided to split the combined work into two after people began to comment that they needed a forklift to handle it. At that time, I had no idea it would take one full year and many, many careful revisions to create the new book and companion workbook.

This edition offers a more hands-on approach through a highly personal tone. Following each chapter, I added vignettes that relate a couple's journey through the coaching process. This uniquely compelling element not only conveys valuable concepts, but it also shows how you might apply what you learn to your own life.

The Journey from "I-TO-WE" teaches couples how to gain awareness, learn skills, and practice techniques to be "Best Friends during the Day, Lovers at Night, and Partners for Life." My structured coaching program—"Create an Emotionally Intelligent Relationship"—is a comprehensive, 23-step process based on the actual techniques I employ to coach my clients so that they achieve relationship success at home, at work and within themselves.

My framework models "the best of the best" teachings. In covering each topic, I blended highly respected research with insights from my own life experiences and coaching practice. The "Create an Emotionally Intelligent Relationship" program, as a result, uniquely encompasses all of the crucial areas and aspects of a couple's relationship, and presents them in a personally powerful yet simple-to-follow, practical format.

The Journey from "I-TO-WE"

Acknowledgment

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The Journey from "I-TO-WE"

Dedication

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