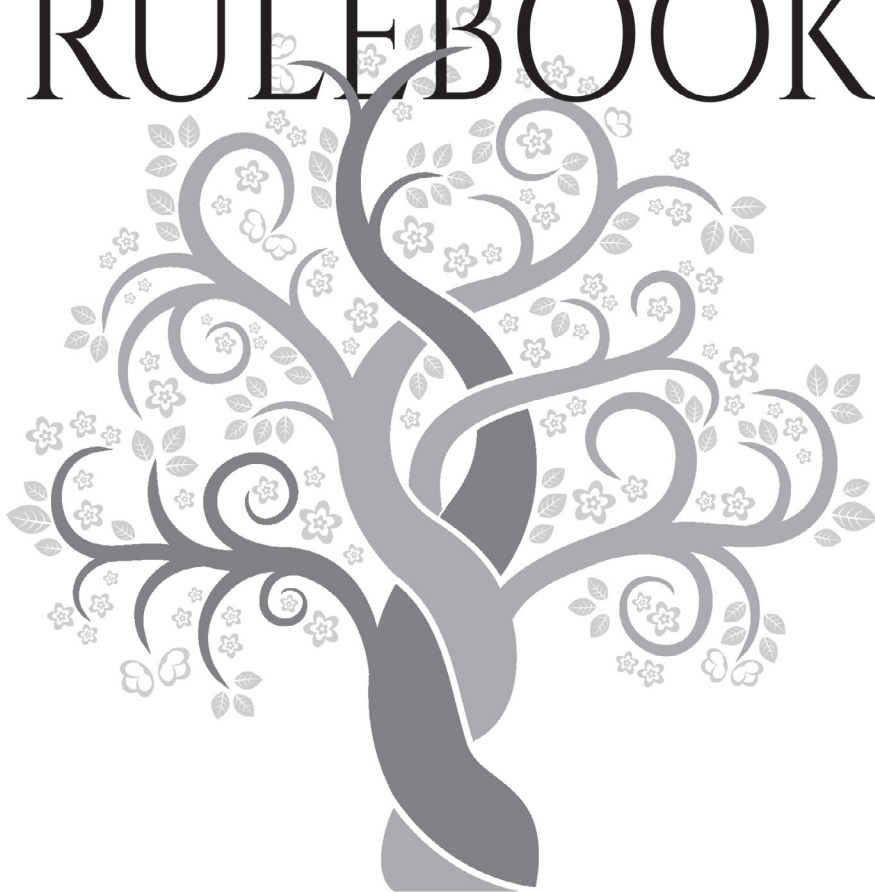


the
COUPLES
RULEBOOK



20 RULES *for a* BETTER RELATIONSHIP

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Privacy is a critical element of relationship coaching. To protect client confidentiality, names and identifying details of individuals in this book have been changed. In some cases, for the sake of the example, client stories may be a blend of several client's experiences.

This book is not intended to be a substitute for professional mental health counseling or couples therapy. It is intended to help your relationship. If it works, great. If it doesn't, stop using it. That's the limit of our liability. We don't claim to be doctors, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, licensed marriage and family counselors, licensed clinical social workers, astronauts, superheroes, pilots, lawyers, or smarter than anybody else. We're a couple of relationship coaches who have helped a lot of couples be better together and we don't claim to be anything more than that.

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Why The Couples Rulebook?



When we started working as relationship coaches, we began to see a lot of similarities between the challenges that most couples experience. We saw the things that messed up relationships. We even saw the things in other relationships that we struggled with as a couple. We knew that working with couples through the current problem wasn't going to be enough. We wanted each partner to have the tools they needed to avoid the future problem. We wanted to help couples survive the disagreements that surface when two people decide to live one life.

Conflict should be expected in relationships, after all, no two people are exactly the same forever. Even when we find the perfect partner, we each grow, change, suffer, and mature at different times. Two individuals are going to experience life in different ways. From buying a sofa to managing three kids and a dog, there will be different ideas and opinions. Navigating the inevitable decisions and potential conflicts will ultimately tell the story of your relationship's success or its failure. We hope this book will serve as a guide to turn the challenges into an incredibly strong bond. It isn't the absence of conflict that creates a great relationship—it is how a couple gets through the conflict that will define a relationship as good or bad along the way.

Anyone in a relationship will benefit from these rules. Whether you are married, “friends with benefits,” just met, “hooking up,” engaged, exclusive, “Facebook Official,” dating, “seeing other people,” “on a break,” or divorced with children, these rules can help you and that other person keep things real. If both participants know the rules, it will make whatever you’re doing—and whatever you’re calling it—a more pleasant experience. After all, if you’re playing ping pong and they’re swinging for the fences with a baseball bat, somebody is cheating and somebody else is going to get slammed.

When does a relationship become a relationship? The strict dictionary definitions of relationship can range from “the way in which people interact,” to “a romantic or sexual friendship between two people.” In our definition, and according to these rules, the easiest way to know that you’re in a relationship, is to analyze your own expectations of that other person’s actions and behaviors. Do you expect that he will text you back quickly or that she will stop seeing other people now that she’s spending time with you? These are all indications that you’ve entered into something that will benefit from these rules. If you or that other person have expectations, congratulations, you’re in a relationship and it needs to get some ground rules.

If you’re lucky enough to be experiencing the relationship of your dreams—you’ve found your “soulmate” or got this book as a wedding gift—congratulations. You and your partner deserve great joy. This book will help even those lucky people, because as most longterm couples will tell you, we are all soulmates at the beginning. Love is easy, amazing, and awesome when it’s starting out. We hope this book will help establish the kind of communication that can keep that soulmate feeling going until you’re both in your 90s and

looking back on a wonderful life. When everything is going great, it's a great time to set up the system that keeps it that way.

If your relationship is at the point that Google is frequently displaying divorce attorney ads next to recipes, sports scores, and cat videos, this book can help you too. Even if your relationship is "in the ditch," or "circling the drain," it's not too late to make things better. Whether you're fixing the current relationship or trying to break the pattern so that the next one will be the right one, this book can give you some fresh new ways to think about love.

The rules in this book aren't really in order of importance. Like all rulebooks, Rule 14 might be the one you need right now. If Rule 14 of a sports rulebook covers when a player is out of bounds, then that rule won't matter until a player goes near the edge of the field. If everybody stays in the middle, Rule 14 may never come into play. The rules aren't more important based on the order they appear in the book, but rather they are most important based on the situation your relationship is in at the moment. That said, we've written the rulebook to be a quick read in order from Rule 1 to Rule 20, so it's best to start at the beginning and finish at the end.

We had a lot of discussion about whether the concept of relationship advice should even be in a rulebook format. After all, relationships shouldn't be a game. Most people hate "playing games" when it comes to relationships. Yet, rulebooks aren't just for games. They can be designed to provide a framework for the management of government or parliamentary activities such as *Robert's Rules of Order*, or they can be crafted to guide implementation of policies such as the *Rules of the Paris Climate Agreement*.

While rules are not just for games, rulebooks do most commonly guide gameplay. Whether you're playing cards and busting out

Hoyle's Book of Rules or playing Monopoly and arguing over your family's long-standing rules for landing on the jail space, you're probably being guided by rules. Ultimately, most game rulebooks have to tell you how to keep score and how to win the game.

When it comes to relationships, how would that work? Is there a score for relationships? Some people keep track of a good relationship in terms of years that a couple has been together. After all, weren't our grandparents married for 60 plus years and they got viewed as the benchmark for successful relationships? But is that a practical scoring model in today's complicated relationship world? In fact, some sociologists say that long-term marriages are far less likely in today's society where people are waiting longer to marry and divorce is becoming more widely accepted. If longevity is the scoring method, we're pretty much all screwed.

Other people will tell you that happiness makes the best scorekeeper. That tends to be pretty subjective though. Can you really decide that your relationship is okay just because you're feeling happy on a random Tuesday? Maybe overall happiness is a better judge. For some, it might be as simple as being happy more often than being unhappy. If we're scoring based on overall happiness, then maybe you don't get a score until the end, in which case you should have the most fun possible along the way. Thus, the rules.

Ultimately, from our perspective, there is no scorekeeping and there is no winning. If your relationship is still together, call that winning. If you've decided to wake up in the same house tomorrow and work on the relationship again, then you should probably view that as scoring points. If things are good, you're winning—but you've got to keep working on it because relationships can be illogical and everything changes along the way. We may go to bed

one night winning at relationship Monopoly only to wake up the next morning with a sinking battleship, two pawns, and a yard dart stuck in our forehead. The relationship game is constantly changing. These rules seek to make it easier to roll with those changes so that you're both on the same page. After all, you're on the same team and you should be cheering for every team to win. The only ones who lose the game are the ones who walk away and they should have every chance to win in their next go around.

NOTES ABOUT THE STRUCTURE OF THE RULEBOOK:

Each rule is worded to stand on its own. We list a few quotes from history or pop culture just to show that the rule is pretty widely known. The rule is then explained in a way that helps you understand it. Each rule has an example or two to show how the rule works. At the end of each rule, there's a section called "Head Said / Heart Said" so we, the authors, can offer some of our personal insight into the rule.

For formatting sake, the rules have been divided into four subsections:

- ▶ **The differences (Rules 1—4):** These are the ways in which we see all relationships functioning. Understanding these first four rules is a way to understand how each partner is operating. We all operate differently in these areas. This is how we are wired when it comes to the basics of relationships.

- ▶ **The advice (Rules 5-10):** These rules are just good to follow. Think of these as the todo list for your relationship. These are the specific steps that you can take to help your relationship be amazing or amazing again.
- ▶ **The troubleshooters (Rules 11-14):** These rules are useful if you're having specific areas of the relationship that are creating friction. These rules give a bigger understanding of the complex issues relationships may face.
- ▶ **The truisms (Rules 15-20):** These are things that are true in most relationships. They're the extra things that can be helpful to understand and discuss together.

RULE ONE



Everyone Has A Relationship Style

“The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of...”

BLAISE PASCAL,
French Philosopher

“The heart wants what it wants.”

EMILY DICKINSON,
Poet

“The chief function of the body is to carry the brain around.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN

“Cogito, ergo sum.” (“I think, therefore I am.”)

RENE DESCARTES,
French Philosopher

RULE 1



Everyone Has A Relationship Style

In relationships, there are typically two kinds of styles—heart and head. Hearts are the feelers, they respond to situations and make decisions based on how they are feeling in that moment and the people involved. Heads are the thinkers, responding to relationship decisions through logic and objective principles. Neither approach is right, they're just different.

This rule applies to how you make decisions in your relationships, not how you make decisions in your job or the other parts of your life. Those styles can be completely different. It is possible for an analytical accountant to be a great big heart when in love. At the same time, the compassionate vet tech can be a head-led partner at home.

The differences between hearts and heads are significant and these differences play a big role in most of the other rules in this book. In our work with relationship clients and in our seminars, we find that we spend a great deal of time talking about the challenges between how heart partners feel about things and how head partners think about things.

Understanding your own style will help you understand why you make the choices you make. Understanding your partner's relationship style will help you understand the way they operate and lead to more effective communication. As you begin to understand

the difference between heart and head, you'll also find that you can better understand other relationships in your life such as the way your children interact or how you interact with people at work.

When a relationship encounters conflict, it is generally possible to identify which partner is leading with their heart and which is being guided by their head. Most relationship trouble can be narrowed down to the difference in style, so it's important to know how these styles are at play in your relationships.

RULE 1, CLARIFICATION 1: *You can do both but not be both*

Most people believe they are a balanced, fully functional human. While we are all capable of feeling and thinking, we each have a preferred style of making decisions in our relationships. Heads are capable of feeling but it doesn't make them a heart. And hearts can make logical, thought-based decisions in their relationships—they just don't do it that way on first impulse. When you really look deeply at how people behave in relationships, you'll see the operational style that they prefer.

Think about this: If it is your turn to plan a date night, and you want to go to dinner and then dancing, are you more likely to pick the restaurant and club that have great memories for you or will you pick a restaurant and club that are close together so you only have to pay to park the car once? Even these simple scenarios can be filled with "a little of both" but the preference—the first instinct—is the important part. Do you go with your feelings or do you naturally trust your log-

ical ability to think things through? Even if you are 45-percent feeling and 55-percent logic, then head is your primary style.

Or this scenario: Lately, your best friend talks too much. You've been friends since elementary school but recently they've developed a habit of going on-and-on about everything. Are you the kind of person who just comes out and says, "What is up with you and all the talking?" Or are you afraid to hurt their feelings so you hope it's just a passing phase? Hearts focus on people, relationships, and feelings. The heart will generally hold back with things that could be taken as criticism. Heads focus more on situations and tend to plow ahead with logic.

There's not a right way to go through life. Being a heart has advantages and being a head does too. As you'll see in Rule 1-3, hearts and heads are generally attracted to each other. Rule 1-4 explains why even two hearts or two heads in a relationship will end up being affected by the disparity between these two relationships styles. As you learn this rule, it is at play in almost all of the other rules so it can be really helpful to understand your style and the preferred style that your partner uses.

RULE 1-1: *Hearts value connection and love*

For the heart partner, the desire is to feel love. Hearts value the feeling of connection—deep, meaningful connection. They usually seek the attention of their partner in relationships to get this connection.

When a heart is feeling deeply connected to their partner, they are passionate lovers and strong supporters. They can also be "peo-

ple pleasers” who try a little too hard to make sure everyone else is happy.

Deep emotional love is easy for hearts to feel and maintain. They can carry the love feeling around with them all day and anticipate sharing that feeling again with their partner after work. Hearts can be more physically affectionate and comfortable with their sexuality. They may enjoy more interaction than heads and are prone to share their feelings enthusiastically. They tend to avoid telling people unpleasant things that might hurt the other person’s feelings.

When the connection is weakened with their partner the heart feels that disconnect and worries that something is wrong in the relationship. They may wonder what they have or have not done. The heart wants to fix it right away so they can go back to feeling the connection. They begin an inward search to try and repair the bond of the relationship. They ask more questions and more closely observe their mate, seeking answers.

It isn’t just hearts that want to feel love, we all have an innate desire to feel love. Hearts place emotional connection as the filter through which all things run. Heads value emotional love but they have a different filtering process.

Hearts are typically drawn to art, music, animals, children, people, nature, and beautiful things. They enjoy and dream about a life that holds fairy tale components. Hearts care about people and weigh what other people care about when they make decisions. They want harmony and are compassionate even to the point of valuing tact over the hard truth.

Hearts in a troubled partnership with a head will often say that they feel alone in the relationship. They feel that the other partner is