

This book is a "user's manual" for those interpersonal relationships called love. Marital statistics are alarming: one in every two marriages ends in divorce. Dr. Ferrandino believes that the skill-base (i.e., technology) necessary to manage marital and family systems is absent or insufficient. Employing examples from almost forty years of clinical/teaching experience, Dr. Ferrandino explains the types of love and provides useful exercises for skill-building and practice in the technology of love.

## **The Technology of Love: Successful Strategies for Low Maintenance Relationships**

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**JOSEPH J. FERRANDINO, Ph.D.**



# The Technology of Love:

**Successful  
Strategies for  
Low Maintenance  
Relationships**

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## Introduction

Happiness is a how, not a what....

--Hermann Hesse

Think of it—the computer, the DVD, the garage door opener, the remote! These are some of the technological marvels that most of us use every day and we appreciate them for their economy and efficiency. Yet, in our relationships, our interpersonal interactions, our patterns of love and loving, most of us use a “technology” that is outmoded, outdated, and historically obsolete. The results are relationship difficulties, a high divorce rate, dysfunctional family interactions, poor communication and all of the attendant emotional stress that this implies.

It would be difficult for me today to use a typewriter to write these words now that I have become familiar and comfortable with a word processor. A typewriter is *obsolete technology*. It is troubling therefore in my role as a therapist to see people I work with trying their best to achieve a present-day objective using an outdated technology.

I have been a therapist to individuals, couples, and families and a teacher of counselors and therapists for almost forty years. When I see, day after day, the problems, frustrations, challenges, and stresses that most people face in their interpersonal interactions, I have feelings of sadness and frustration. Sadness about the pain they are going through and frustration because it could be so different.

I find it remarkable how so many individuals either are in or have been willing to enter into relationships with a woefully inadequate set of skills for understanding or maintaining a relationship. It is particularly curious given that any professional or technical employment from plumber to psychologist *requires* education, training, and some sort of socially and legally sanctioned credential.

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Most people actually do have some version of a “technology” for interpersonal interactions that was learned from their families, peers, reading, advertising, media (particularly television), and the culture in general. Yet, the alarming statistics on mental health problems associated with interpersonal interactions indicate that these rudimentary tools are clearly insufficient, inadequate, and ineffective. One in every two marriages ends in divorce, relationship and family problems are the leading cause of referral to mental health delivery systems<sup>1</sup>, and the emotional impact of these issues on individuals, children, and families runs in the tens of millions. Attempting to manage the intricacies and demands of an intimate interpersonal interaction with the tools provided by the current social environment is akin to performing surgery with a pocketknife.

Numerous studies on interpersonal skills support what would seem to be intuitively obvious—that there are ways of conducting human interactions that are more efficient, economical, and stress-free and which create a more solid, comfortable, and consistent homeostatic interpersonal balance. Or, what some would describe as “low maintenance relationships.” This research has given birth to a whole new “technology” of interpersonal skills. In a literal sense then, this “technology” is a set of rules and tools for interpersonal interactions that can and should be applied to relationships, and, specifically, those types of relationships that take the name “love.”

It is said that the current “electronic” revolution in terms of the transmission of information is equivalent, insofar as its impact on society goes, to the industrial revolution. I view the evolution of a new interpersonal technology in much the same light. A word processor is more efficient than a typewriter. An antibiotic is more effective than leeches. Here is the good news: despite what advertising and the media might present, *interpersonal relationships are not unmanageable and mysterious*. As Erich Fromm<sup>2</sup> pointed out many years ago, love and loving are like crafts that require specific skills that can be learned. What is the secret of low maintenance relationships? The consistent

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application of a skill-based interpersonal “technology” that results in low maintenance behavior.

Relationships that are described as “love” or “loving” (friendships, family, intimate) are a subset of relationships in general. It is those types of relationships that seem to present the most difficulties and which raise the most questions. Probably the most challenging of those relationships is a committed intimate union between two adults. Because it is the most challenging, it is the one that I will use as my primary model in this book. Bear in mind, however, that the essential elements of this “technology” are easily generalizable to the other varieties of interpersonal interactions referred to as “love.”

When I speak to my clients and students about how these types of interactions could be managed differently, they have frequently asked if I could write down some of these suggestions as a kind of guide book for healthy, low-maintenance relationships. In fact, one of my clients who was a technical writer for a computer company said, “You know when people buy computers, they get these user’s manuals my team writes to help them understand the machine. They should have something like that for relationships.” This book then is an attempt to explain this new “technology” and to demonstrate its application in the area of interpersonal interactions, i.e., the technology of love.

Every explorer from Lewis and Clark to the Apollo 11 astronauts has had as one of their aims the objective of mapping the new territory that they were exploring. The field of psychology is no different. From Freud to Albert Ellis to Abraham Maslow, each of these pioneers has attempted to chart a territory of the psyche. Eric Fromm, Rollo May, Eric Berne, and many others have attempted to chart the territory of interpersonal relationships, particularly those that would fall under the category of love. This work is an attempt to continue that legacy. And, since no technology can be understood outside of the territory to which it applies, it is there that we begin.



This book is a "user's manual" for those interpersonal relationships called love. Marital statistics are alarming: one in every two marriages ends in divorce. Dr. Ferrandino believes that the skill-base (i.e., technology) necessary to manage marital and family systems is absent or insufficient. Employing examples from almost forty years of clinical/teaching experience, Dr. Ferrandino explains the types of love and provides useful exercises for skill-building and practice in the technology of love.

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