

YES, YOU CAN!! !

Stop Playing TAG
and
Start Being Happy

Dr. Glenn Pickering

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1.) MY PROMISE TO YOU

If you are like many of the individuals or couples who come to me for help, you are probably wondering, “Can you help me/us get back to the (better) relationship we used to have?”

The answer is “no,” for two reasons. One, I don’t have the power to rewind time; I’m good but I’m not that good! Secondly, even if I did have the power, I wouldn’t want that for you. How you were back then is how you got to here! Even if I could take you back to where you were two years ago, for example, that would just mean that two years from now, you would be coming to me for help.

I am NOT here to help to stay in survival mode, put a Band-aid on your wounded relationship, or help you to re-create the type of relationship you already know how to build. I have goals for you that are much, much higher than that.

My goal is to help you to create and then continually build upon the sort of relationships that you have never had before.

My goal for you is nothing less than transformation – a whole new way of being in relationship.

In that process, I will not judge you, criticize your struggles, point fingers, or help you to decide “whose fault it is” that you are the way you are. I have way more compassion for you than that. Besides which, none of that other stuff matters.

You and I are not here to focus on the past, which means that we are not here to focus on your problems, judge anybody else, or settle for a slightly improved version of the relationships you already know how to do.

We are here because you are an intense, vital, richly gifted human being, not a problem to be solved.

We are here because you are ready to move far beyond your struggles and build a truly great relationship – something far beyond what most people ever achieve.

We are here because we know that you are totally capable of creating passionate, emotionally intense, physically active, sexually playful, spiritually connected, and incredibly honest relationships. All you need is a little help; with that help, you can have the exciting kinds of relationships that make every day a joyful adventure.

Or, you can choose to crash and burn, instead.

You can't coast, any longer.

You are at the point where you know that just continuing on in your same old ways is not going to work and is not going to make you happy. Your life is about to either get way better or to fall apart.

That's why I would encourage you to set your sights high, embrace your situation without judgment, apply the very personal, concrete lessons that I will happily teach you, and get ready for a miracle.

Because you can have that miracle.

That's my promise to you.

And you should aim for nothing less.

That's my challenge for you.

2.) THE RESULTS YOU CAN EXPECT

A previous student recently wrote, “Glenn, before we met you, our marriage was in terrible trouble. We felt distant from one another and we experienced that disconnectedness in every part of our life. We misunderstood each other constantly, we did not spend regular time together, our sex life was sporadic and impersonal, our mutual prayer life was non-existent, our unresolved conflicts created bad arguments that were followed by uncomfortable silences, and all of the fun had gone out of our relationship.

We were going through the motions, to be honest. The future looked bleak.

The only things we had going for us were a deep desire for things to be better and a real willingness to learn.

With your help, we have left all of that behind. Now we feel connected, all the way down to our hearts. We ‘get’ each other, we have fun together, and everything feels lighter, somehow, instead of being so serious. I used to walk around on eggshells in my own home. Now, our home is loving, calm, and peaceful.

It is truly a joy to be so happy and to be able to teach others the things that we have learned from you. Through us, you are blessing people you don’t even know!”

I loved that letter. It made it so clear – when people learn how to recognize and then break out of the game of TAG, it’s not just that their “communication problems” disappear. It’s that **every aspect** of their relationships and their lives gets transformed.

Your life can be fun again. And loving.

AND you can learn how to teach others how to have fun and be loving. That’s the really great part – you can become a force for good, in the lives of the people around you.

Isn’t that what we all want?

Once you truly “get” how to replace your old interaction patterns with loving conversations, you can learn to support, care for, and adore the people in your life, in a whole new way – a way that will make their lives better, too.

In that process, you can replace:

- your current misunderstandings with caring communication,
- your old arguments with passionate conversations,
- your previous mean-spirited judgments with real acceptance,
- you cold silences with child-like joy, and
- your spiritual and sexual disconnection with a deep and abiding love.

All of this can be yours.

Beginning Now.

3.) THE POWER OF YOUR DISBELIEF

If you are like most people, you reacted to the previous two sections of this book with a surge of hope but also a wave of doubt.

It's not that you doubted my honesty, my credentials, or my ability to help others.

If you are like most people, you doubted that you could learn to create such great relationships and build such an amazing life.

Your reasons for doubting yourself might well seem logical to you.

Perhaps you are like my wife, Gwen, who grew up in a loud family that struggled with anger, alcohol, and broken relationships. Maybe you haven't even seen a good relationship, much less been in one.

Or, perhaps you are like me and grew up in a very quiet, isolated family that struggled with finding ways to relate to anyone outside of that family. So, maybe you have never developed the skills that it would take connect deeply with the people in your life.

Perhaps the relationship you are in right now has gotten so bad that it seems to be beyond repair. Even if you did want to repair it. Which maybe you think you don't.

Perhaps your (or their) past is littered with relationships that did not work out, which leaves you feeling hopeless and leads you to believe that this relationship will end in the same way.

Perhaps one or both of you have managed to upset the other one's family members so badly that you can't imagine a future that includes being lovingly connected to them or to your partner.

Perhaps you believe that the two of you are so different that the relationship could never work out.

No matter the reason for your disbelief, the effect of that disbelief is very hurtful to you. It keeps you from having what you really want.

But that stops now.

You CAN have the life you want.

It starts with getting the right help.

If I wanted to learn how to play the piano, I would first look for a good piano teacher – someone who could teach me, step by step, the things that I needed to learn, in order to play the piano.

It's the same with relationships.

If you want to learn how to build truly great relationships, you need to start by finding the right teacher – someone who can show you, one step at a time, how to create the loving relationships you have always wanted.

As my thousands of former students can tell you, I am that teacher.

I am going to share with you a few of their comments – NOT to build myself up but to help you to understand that people with problems just as serious as yours CAN learn to create great relationships and live amazing lives.

Like so many of the couples who come to see me, Andrew and Linda had virtually given up. In their words, "For a long time, we told ourselves that our relationship wasn't really that bad, that every couple had problems, and that things would get better. Finally, when the situation got so awful that we were fighting even in front of the children, we had to admit that we needed help. Unfortunately, by that time we had very little hope. The 'D-word' was getting thrown around a lot and I had already seen an attorney.

In desperation, we went to one of Glenn's seminars. That experience was so powerful! We each saw ourselves so clearly in his examples that it made us laugh. And then cry. And then get to work.

Now, everything is different – his teachings have changed all of the relationships in our lives, especially our marriage. I truly would not

have believed that we could have a life, a marriage, and a family like the one we have now.”

But they do. And so can you!

Matthew wanted to tell you that, “My friends and family all told me that I should get out of my relationship with Lisa. But something deep down in me believed that it would be wrong to give up. I thank God that I didn’t. Glenn’s simple yet profound teachings, seminars, and books have helped us to have the kind of nurturing, supportive relationship that we were almost afraid to hope for.”

Karen, a single mom, said, “My relationship with my teenage daughter was awful – just like my relationship was with my mom. When someone told me about the work that Glenn did with families, I was torn. I desperately wanted something better, but I have been disappointed so often in life that I didn’t really believe I could have that better life. Now I know – with the loving support of a great teacher, anyone can do it. I am SO glad that I listened to my friend.”

Or, as Dorothy said, “I now hear the sorts of heart-felt words from my husband that I truly thought I would never hear. I have gone from thinking ‘I will never have that’ to ‘I can’t wait to see what the next step looks like.’ Thank-you, Glenn, for giving me a reason to hope.”

Over and over again, my students tell me that they used to believe that they could never learn how to create the relationships they longed for.

As you will read in a moment, I, too, grew up believing that I could never have any of the things that I wanted and that the sorts of relationships that I wanted to be in were especially out of my reach.

I was wrong.

And so are you.

You CAN have what you want.

Let me tell you why I am so sure of this.

4.) MY STORY

It's important for you to know that I did not start out in life knowing how to build great relationships – with my family members or with anyone else!

I was a very shy, quiet kid. I know it sounds crazy, but I didn't talk out loud in school until the 2nd grade. I didn't start conversations with anyone else, because I was so reserved and socially awkward. And nobody else started real conversations with me, either. I was the bent-over kid with coke bottle glasses and seemingly nothing to say.

Truly, the only kids who said anything to me were the bullies. And the things that they had to say were not exactly uplifting – their cruel comments just strengthened my belief that the world was a cold and uncaring place.

Despite my near-total inability to relate to others, I did well in school, particularly in math and science. When I went to college, I majored in engineering (of course!). While I was in college, two life-changing events occurred. First, my father died. For a child who had very few friends and idolized his dad, that was a shock, to say the least. If I had any doubts as to whether I really was alone in the world, my father's death removed them. I was convinced that relationships brought nothing but pain and I began to wonder why I was even here.

A year later, still grieving and confused, I took an elective course in psychology. Wow! In that class, I learned that people's behaviors could be understood, that relationships worked (or didn't work!) for some very specific reasons, and that I could actually learn to make sense of what had seemed to me to be a meaningless, chaotic world.

That experience changed my life in a profound way. Ever since that class, I have been on a mission!

Truly, I have spent the past forty years studying relationships – learning how to build, strengthen, and maintain truly amazing connections with God and with other people.

Those forty years of study did include lots of formal education - after receiving my engineering degree, I went to seminary, became a United Methodist pastor, and later went back to school to get my PhD in psychology.

However, my real education began after that. For the past 32 years, I have had the honor of teaching, counseling, and mentoring thousands of people, each of whom taught me something about the art of living in relationship.

Because I am an avid learner and a scientist at heart, I have taken careful note of all that I have learned from those thousands of clients and students. In that process, I have come to truly understand the mistakes that we all make in relationships, the reasons why we make them, the steps we need to take, in order to overcome them, and the incredible joy that we all experience, when we do.

I have used all that I have learned to create a life that I truly would not trade with anybody – a life filled with loving relationships, a clear sense of purpose, and a powerful desire to teach others all that I have learned.

I want for you to have that same sort of life.

Because this struggle has been so personal to me, you will notice that all of my teachings are clear, personal, and from the heart - my heart and the hearts of all of the people who have allowed me to be in the struggle with them.

If you are willing to apply those teachings, you CAN have the life you want. I have literally seen, with my own eyes, the transformational power of these teachings and I want nothing less than for you to experience that same transformation.

I thank you for your willingness to trust me and to be open to those teachings.

May they be a blessing to you and to the people you love.

- - - Rev. Dr. Glenn Pickering

5.) THE FIRST KEY TO SUCCESS: UNDERSTANDING THE GAME

We all want, more than anything else, to be in right relationship with the people around us. In fact, the case could be made that our relationships are the ONLY thing that really matters to us.

Let's say that I told you, "At your command, I could wave a magic wand and give you exactly the life you want. The only rule is that your life can't have anything to do with other people. From now on, you won't be able to see other people, talk to other people, read books that other people have written, listen to music that other people have sung, spend time in the vicinity of others, do things to care for or impress others, receive affection or attention from others, buy or sell things to others, or have anything to do with other people. Other than that, you can have anything you want. So, what do you want?"

That doesn't leave much, does it?

Apart from our relationships, our lives literally have no purpose and no meaning.

Intuitively, we all know this. And so you would think that all of us would consistently honor our relationships and would work hard, day in and day out, to build really great ones. That way, our lives would be filled with constant joy. That would make sense, right?

But, that's not what we do.

All too often, we choose, instead, to argue with people, build walls, get hurt, say critical things, harbor unforgiving thoughts and feelings, remain silent, or isolate ourselves.

In other words, we chose to maintain a state of wrong relationship, instead of creating a right relationship

Why???!!!

Why do we act in ways that prevent us from getting the one thing we really want?

Why do we so often fail to live in right relationship with one another?

Because of a game that we don't even know we are playing.

The Childhood Version of the Game (Tag)

Think back, just for a minute, to when you were a little kid. Do you remember running around in the backyard, playing a game called Tag? It was a very simple game, with only a few rules.

In this game, there was no one on your team.

And there was only one goal - to not be IT.

It was actually an odd sort of game. There was no way to win, no points to score, and literally nothing that you were trying to accomplish. All you were ever trying to do was to not be the one that was IT.

Basically, there were two ways to not be IT.

The first was to avoid becoming IT, in the first place.

When you were not IT and wanted to stay that way, you kept an eye on all of the other kids in the game and you tried to keep yourself at a safe distance from all of them. Why all of them? Well, obviously, you didn't want to be too close to the person who was IT. But you didn't want to be too close to anyone else, either. Why? Because they could have become IT at any instant, at which point they would have been dangerous to you.

So, you constantly watched, adjusted your position, and kept moving, so as to avoid being too close to any of the other kids, all of whom were either the enemy or a potential enemy.

That was one way to not be IT – to keep your distance from everyone, so as not to get tagged.

Then, when you did get tagged, you switched to a very different approach – a more active approach. You ran right at people, as fast as your little feet would carry you, so that you could tag them and make them them IT. It didn't matter if the other person was your friend, if they were tired, if they were younger, or if they had already been IT before. You didn't care. You just wanted to tag them, as quickly as you could, so that once again, you were not IT.

And then what did you do? You went right back to the first set of strategies – the things that you did to avoid being IT in the first place.

The Adult Version of the Game (TAG)

How does this childhood game apply to relationships? As it turns out, you are playing exactly that same game, anytime a relationship is going badly. Anytime you are not experiencing the joy that comes from living in right relationship, it is because you are choosing to play TAG, instead.

Think back to the last interaction you had that went poorly. You might have:

- interrupted or disagreed with the other person,
- justified your behavior,
- felt you needed to “explain” a decision you made,
- tried to defend something you said,
- maintained an angry silence,
- or judged them, silently, in your head.

In each of these cases, you probably thought that you are trying to “prove” that you were right, either to them or to yourself (inside of your head).

But you weren’t trying to be right. You were anxiously trying not to be wrong.

You were trying not to be IT, just like in Tag. We call this adult version of the game TAG. The goal of the two games is exactly the same - to not be IT

The two main strategies are the same, too. First, just like a kid, you try not to become IT in the first place. We call these the “passive” strategies. In this case, you might:

- keep your thoughts to yourself,
- avoid certain people and topics,
- shut down emotionally and verbally when a conflict occurs,
- or talk with everyone EXCEPT the person with whom you are in conflict.

If these avoidance (passive) strategies don't work and you become IT – you do get criticized, blamed, or mistreated – then, just like a little kid, you want to quickly tag someone else, so that they are IT, instead of you. You might:

lash out, verbally and emotionally,

blame others,

get defensive (a not so subtle way of blaming the other person),

get angry (or act hurt),

start crying,

or leave the room in a huff.

All of these are examples of ways in which you (actively) attempt to make it clear that they are IT, not you.

Some people generally play the passive versions of the game – they rely on the first approach, where they strive to avoid becoming IT in the first place.

Passive TAG players are often said to be nice, quiet, laid back, or busy.

If you or anyone else has ever used these sorts of words to describe you, you need to know that you probably play the passive versions of TAG so often that it has become a lifestyle for you.

When entire families play TAG passively, their families are often described, by themselves and others, as being very close. It is true that the consistent avoidance of conflict does indeed help these families to go for long periods of time without any overt arguments. However, it is also true that the people in these families tend to:

- not talk about their struggles,
- keep their thoughts to themselves,
- choose to acquiesce, rather than engage,
- and keep their intimate interactions to a minimum.

So, clearly, there is a price to be paid for this type of “closeness.”

As my client, Janet, once said, “I always thought that my family was really close. But as I got older, I began to realize how hard it was to have a meaningful conversation with anyone in my family. We could talk about superficial things, or certain safe topics, but we never talked about anything personal.

I didn’t want to acknowledge this, at first, even to myself. Then, on one of my visits home, I discovered that one of my siblings had been in the hospital and another one’s child had recently gotten married, without any of the rest of us even knowing that those things were happening. And I had to admit – we had “gotten along so well,” all of those years, not because we were so close, but because we kept each other at a safe distance.

It was painful to see that and it was hard to admit it. But, now that I am seeing things more clearly, I have been able to start creating deeper relationships with the people in my life, especially with my husband and my children.”

So, passive TAG players use a child’s first strategy – they try to achieve the goal of not being IT by avoiding anything that even might lead to conflict, criticism, mistakes, or failure, so that they never get tagged in the first place.

Conversely, people and families that play the active versions of TAG use the second strategy – the one where you tag other people, to make them IT.

Active TAG players are often described as angry, loud, or critical.

In these families, there might be a lot of:

- (repeated) arguments,
- critical comments (often in the guise of humor)
- “debates” about who is “right” (not IT)
- derogatory/judgmental comments about others,
- and a high degree of tension.

People outside of the family might describe it as being loud, intense, angry and/or a lot of fun (“They really know how to party!”). But, in reality, the people in such families

are not actually angry and they generally aren't having a whole lot of fun.

As a former client, David, once said, "Even when things were going OK, I knew that it could all go bad in an instant. I walked around on eggshells when I was growing up, and I still feel like that when I go back to visit. I know that I am never more than one wrong word, move, or decision away from unleashing a tirade of criticism or ridicule."

In families like David's, no one has fun, at least not for very long. And no one is actually angry, either. They are all incredibly anxious, waiting for the next shoe to drop, the next explosion to occur. They are not even hoping for the absence of explosions – they're just hoping they aren't the cause of the next one.

Most families, of course, are not as extreme as either Janet's or David's. However, all people and families play passive TAG and/or active TAG some of the time and it's important to understand the consequences of the game.

The Outcome of Playing TAG

What's important to understand is this – we all play TAG with people a number of times each day, either passively or actively. And every time we play, we damage our relationship with that other person. Not totally. Not in any obvious way. In a subtle way that gradually crumbles the foundation of our relationships.

Think about it. When you say that you don't trust a certain person, what do you mean? You mean that, over time, you have concluded that they are not totally honest (they play passive versions of TAG), or that they are not really safe to be around (they play an active version of TAG). And so your trust in them has crumbled, over time.

When you say things like, "My kids never talk to me." you mean that they often play passive TAG when they are around you. When you say things like, "My kids are rebellious." or "My kids have an attitude." you mean that they play an active form of TAG when they are around you.

Similarly, when we as adults gossip about others, we are playing the active version of TAG called Team TAG – the game where I agree with you that someone else is IT. It might be one of our mutual children, the people who work in another department, the neighbor, or a person in a magazine. In these sorts of interactions, we don't actually learn anything about each other, and so the relationship will gradually get weaker over time, until it crumbles into nothingness.

No matter how you play, the impact of the game is the same. Every form of TAG will

destroy every relationship, over time. I have come to believe, in fact, that every form of wrong relationship is the result of having played this game.

A Simple Summary

All of which brings us back to the original question – why do we so often get our relationships wrong?

And the four-part answer is:

- 1.) When we get anxious, adrenaline rushes through our body.
- 2.) Adrenaline interferes with the part of our brain that makes conscious, loving decisions. So, we go with our unthinking, fearful, knee-jerk responses.
- 3.) Our knee-jerk, unthinking responses are (hurtful) TAG-playing responses
- 4.) And TAG kills relationships.

An Invitation

If you want to learn more about the ways in which you personally are most likely to play TAG, you can take the simple TAG quiz that follows. You might find the results to be VERY interesting!

If you want to participate in our on-going research study, please let us know the scores that you received, along with your reactions to those scores. We will be glad to hear from you.

As our way of saying thank-you, we will keep you posted on all of our findings and invite you to submit suggestions, when we are ready to create the next generation of the test.

We will give you credit for your contributions, of course, which means that this is your chance to become (slightly) famous!

It will be great to hear from you.

- - - Glenn

Introductory TAG Test

- 1.) I often have trouble accepting compliments or gifts.
a.) True b.) False
- 2.) I often get defensive when there is a misunderstanding or disagreement
a.) True b.) False
- 3.) I am likely to remain silent in meetings, even when there is something I could contribute.
a.) True b.) False
- 4.) When a friend complains about someone, I tend to voice my complaints, as well.
a.) True b.) False
- 5.) I often fear that others will disapprove of me or be disappointed in me.
a.) True b.) False
- 6.) I sometimes say things in anger that I later regret.
a.) True b.) False
- 7.) I often “forget” to tell people things I know will upset them.
a.) True b.) False
- 8.) Sometimes I say “maybe” when I already know my answer is “no”.
a.) True b.) False
- 9.) I tend to be very critical of myself.
a.) True b.) False
- 10.) I know that I am capable of more than what I am doing.
a.) True b.) False
- 11.) I have on-going, unresolved arguments with certain people.
a.) True b.) False

12.) I am a perfectionist.

- a.) True b.) False

13.) People say that I am overly-sensitive to criticism.

- a.) True b.) False

14.) I tend to put things off until the last minute.

- a.) True b.) False

15.) I don't have a lot of long-term friendships

- a.) True b.) False

16.) In an argument, I generally try to have the last word.

- a.) True b.) False

17.) There are people in my life who often lie to me or hide the truth from me.

- a.) True b.) False

18.) Most people say that I am really nice.

- a.) True b.) False

19.) People say that I am dramatic or that my life is filled with drama.

- a.) True b.) False

20.) I like to stay busy.

- a.) True b.) False

21.) I sometimes get into arguments that escalate into louder and louder interactions.

- a.) True b.) False

22.) Some people have told me that my conversations tend to be superficial.

- a.) True b.) False

23.) I can be quite judgmental of others (at least in my head).

- a.) True b.) False

24.) I have been told that I am too controlling.

- a.) True b.) False

25.) I hate to be late.

- a.) True b.) False

26.) I sometimes go along with things that I don't really want to do

- a.) True b.) False

27.) I tend to be pretty laid-back.

- a.) True b.) False

28.) People tell me that I tend to take things too personally.

- a.) True b.) False

29.) In relationships, I often shut down or withdraw, in order to protect myself.

- a.) True b.) False

30.) Some people have told me I can seem intimidating.

- a.) True b.) False

TAG QUESTIONNAIRE SCORING GUIDE

Passive TAG ("true" to the following)

1, 3, 5, 7, 8,

10, 12, 14, 18, 20,

22, 25, 26, 27, 29

Active TAG ("true" to the

2, 4, 6, 9, 11,

13, 15, 16, 17, 19,

21, 23, 24, 28, 30

Passive TAG score (of 15) = _____

Active TAG score (of 15) = _____

Total TAG score (of 30) = _____

6.) THE SEVEN LIES THAT KEEP US IN WRONG RELATIONSHIP

A.) The First Lie Is The Lie We Tell About Ourselves

Most of us see ourselves wrongly – through the lens of our childhood experiences. Those experiences left most of us with one or more of the following beliefs:

- 1.) I'm invisible (I have no impact, so there's no reason to interact; the observer).
- 2.) I'm a bad kid (I'll prove it to you; the troublemaker).
- 3.) Everything is my fault (so, I apologize endlessly; the doormat).
- 4.) I can't do anything right (or, nothing I do is ever good enough; the victim).
- 5.) I need to do everything myself (other people just let you down; the loner).
- 6.) I have to make sure no one is unhappy (the pleaser).
- 7.) I don't really matter (I'm not worth taking care of; the orphan).
- 8.) Nobody else can do it right (that's why I'm so critical; the judge).
- 9.) It's not worth trying (I will just fail or be judged; the passive failure).
- 10.) I need everyone's approval (I am terrified of disapproval; the mascot)
- 11.) I must be the center of attention (because I have nothing to give; the actor)
- 12.) People only care/listen if I force them (so I guilt them into it; the manipulator).

13.) I must be constantly busy (I am only worth what I produce; the achiever).

14.) I have to win (if I lose, that proves I'm a loser; the competitor).

15.) I tell other people what to do (since they're incapable; the caretaking fixer)

16.) Somebody needs to fix/take care of me (I am a bottomless well; the addict)

17.) You have to do it my way (when I'm not in control, I feel anxious; the dictator)

Please feel free to circle any/all of these that fit for you. We will come back to these, in the next chapter. In the meantime, please know three things:

the lie that you believe is indeed a lie.

and there are many, many people who believe the same lie.

The entire game of TAG is based upon this type of lie.

B.) The Second Lie Is: I Have To Hide My True Self

Every version of the first lie comes down to this: we believe that we are Not Good Enough (NGE). As soon as we believe this lie, our first instinct is to make sure that no one else finds out that we're NGE, so as to avoid being judged or criticized. And so we seek to hide ourselves, especially our vulnerabilities and our struggles.

Here's the problem with that:

we connect on the level of our (common) struggles.

I will have lots more to teach you about this, as we go along. For now, it will be helpful if you can just understand this: if I can't share my struggles with you, I can never connect with you. Which means that I will walk through life alone.

In the childhood game of Tag, who is on your team? No one, right?

And once we start playing the adult version of the game, we also end up all alone. The people who come to me for help often say that they have “a communication problem,” which is sort of true. But what they really have is a belief problem. Because if I believe that I need to conceal my true self from you, we will never communicate at a deep, intimate level. Not because we can’t. Because we are afraid to.

C.) The Third Lie: Distance Is My Friend

In the childhood game of TAG, our best way to keep ourselves from being IT is to keep ourselves at a safe distance from everyone else in the game. I can be sort of close to the other players who are not IT, but not too close, for fear that they might become it and then tag me.

All of the passive versions of TAG are about creating distance, as a way to avoid criticism, judgment, or potential failure (for which we would expect to be judged).

Some examples of creating distance are:

- “Forgetting” to tell our spouse about an upcoming evening meeting because we know they will be upset with us.
- Saying “maybe” when we know we won’t be able to attend our child’s event.
- Keeping our thoughts and plans to ourselves.
- Procrastinating (we can’t be judged for something we have not yet finished).
- Saying, “I don’t really care” when we do care.
- Saying, “Anything is fine with me” when that’s not true.
- Saying, “Fine” when people ask how we are doing, even if we are not fine.
- Saying, “Nothing much” when people ask, “What’s new?” even though we are actually going through a big transition.
- Being gone (at work, church, with friends, or in my room), so as not to interact.
- Remaining silent in a meeting, even though we do have something to contribute.

- Getting into relationships with self-centered people, so that we never have to talk about ourselves.
- Keeping secrets about money, sex, or a friend's activities, so as not to be judged.

As you can see, these are all ways to let people be close, but not too close, just like in the game. And just like the childhood game, in the adult game we are just trying to avoid being IT – keeping ourselves “safe” by keeping our distance.

D.) The Fourth Lie: Negativity is “Just Telling It Like It Is”

In the childhood game of Tag, once my passive strategies break down (i.e., I do get tagged), I shift into a different gear. I want to tag somebody else, as fast as I can. It really doesn't matter who, does it? I just want the answer to the question, “Who is IT?” to be “Not me!”

In the adult version of the game, there is a definite focus on the negative. If you listen carefully to a group talking about politics, the weather, the government, their bosses, their health, or almost any other topic, you will often be struck by the negative tone of the group.

All too often, if you were to point out a person's negativity, they might say, “I'm just telling it like it is.” or some version of that statement.

But is that REALLY “telling it like it is?” Is the government, the weather, your boss, your health, or your brother-in-law really all bad? If you were really “telling it like it is,” wouldn't you mention all of the good things about them, as well?

We take a secret delight in verbally tagging others.

Why?

In the game of TAG, whose fault do I want it to be? Not mine.

And when somebody else is IT, I'm not.

And so, we make somebody else IT, instead.

Similarly, when a “nice” person gets criticized, judged, or attacked, we will very suddenly see a whole different side of them. Once they think they're IT, that “nice” person will start blaming somebody else, criticizing the person who is judging them, or “defending” themselves in a way that makes it all too clear – I don't care who else is IT, as long as it's not me.

Negativity is not the truth. It's just a way to not be IT.

E.) The Fifth Lie: The Way To Win An Argument Is To Get Louder

How does a child win the game of Tag? There is no way to win, of course. All you can hope for is to not be IT at the moment.

When is the game of Tag complete? When does it get to resolution? Never. It is the game that never ends.

Similarly, the game of TAG is characterized by lose-lose arguments that never get resolved.

Whenever two people argue, I know the exact number of people who are listening – zero – and the exact number of people who actually have a good point – two.

Each of those people with a good point keeps trying to make their point, feels unheard, rightly, and so tries to make their point over again, even louder. The process escalates until one of the people breaks off the conversation by leaving, or says something so hurtful to the other person that they leave.

In the end, the conflict remains unresolved, which just means that, at some point in the future, we are going to have to have the same argument, all over again. Yuck!

The argument never gets to resolution because, once the game starts, resolution is NOT the goal. What IS the goal? The same as always, in the game; to not be IT.

So, I make you feel like you're IT, you blame me for the problem, so that I'm IT, and so it goes, back and forth. In this scenario, we never get to resolution because resolution isn't even on the table! The question we are REALLY discussing is not "How should we resolve this?" but "Whose fault is it?"

Who actually "wins" that argument? No one. Everybody loses.

When will that discussion get to resolution? Never.

TAG – it's the game that never ends.

F.) The Sixth Lie: I Don't Know What I Want

In the childhood game of Tag, there is no way to win the game. The entire focus is on not being IT.

Similarly, in TAG, there is no positive long-term goal - only the desire to avoid being IT. In TAG-playing families and groups, people spend very little time focused on their vision and even less time expressing that vision. To share your goals or vision would be to invite a reaction or an opinion on the part of others and those reactions and opinions would always be critical and negative, as I just pointed out.

And so, in a TAG-playing family/business/ministry, having and claiming a vision just makes you a target. Consequently, people raised in those groups don't acknowledge their dream. They often act as if they have no goals and frequently take a passive (they call themselves "laid-back") role in life, just to avoid attack - just to keep from being IT.

So, when you ask them about their goals they often say things like "I just take things as they come". If you ask where they want to go out to eat, they often say things like, "anywhere is OK with me." It's all a big lie, of course, but they have been lying for so long that even they have begun to believe it.

So, if you are serious about transforming your life and relationships, you need to do two things. First, you need to be careful about sharing that idea with people who play TAG because they'll always rain on your parade. They'll act as if they're being critical for your own good, of course, but in truth they are simply afraid of ANY type of vision and in their fear they will react negatively to even the best ideas.

Second, you have to watch out for your OWN fears - your tendency to play TAG against yourself. It is easy to start to doubt your own vision, to believe the fearful people in your life, and to give up on your dream before you even start. The best way to defend yourself against your own attacks is to surround yourself with people who challenge you to be your absolute best self - people who believe in you and who are actively living into their dreams.

**It takes courage to claim your visions.
And you DO have visions for your life.**

G.) The Seventh Lie: I'm Just An Anxious Person

Do you know how a child feels when they are playing Tag? Anxious.

Do you know how you feel, when you are playing TAG? Anxious!!!

The game generates anxiety.

But it doesn't have to be that way; you don't have to keep feeling like that.

Once you choose to drop the lies that you are NGE, that you are alone, that you have to keep people at a distance, that you have to go on the attack whenever a problem arises, that you have to "win" an argument, and that you have to hide your vision, you will discover that you are not actually anxious.

This is why life always gets calmer, more peaceful, and more fun, once you learn to break out of the game and create the sorts of relationships you really want.

To be in right relationship with others is to be at peace.

7.) FINDING YOUR WAY HOME

Just as there are seven TAG-based lies that destroy your relationships and your life, there are seven steps to the creation of great relationships and purpose-filled lives.

A.) Step #1: Re-claiming the truth about who I am

The truth is always crazier than fiction. For example, many people have probably said or implied that somewhere along the way, we all have difficult experiences that take from us our child-like purity.

That's a lie. A terrible lie.

Our child-like purity is the one thing that we can never lose.

You are God's precious child and that will never change.

Never.

You think that your experiences, beliefs, bad decisions, or hurtful behaviors, can affect the degree to which you are pure, innocent, or good.

You're wrong.

You are an amazing human being, with incredible gifts. And that never changes.

And let's be honest – many of the people who claim to know that they are precious really don't. That's why certain Christians, for example, instead of accepting the gift, keep trying to earn their way into heaven, mostly by constantly “proving” that they are better than “those other people.”

It's sad.

But then, the lies we cling to are always sad.

The fact is, you were created innocent.

You are still innocent.

That's the crazy truth.

And your innocent self is just crazy enough to believe that you could have the amazing life that you can see in your imagination – a life filled with great relationships and a powerful sense of purpose.

And that crazy, innocent self is right.

Which is why at Beginning Now we spend so much time helping you to re-claim the truth. Because your true self knows that we are right – that you can have an amazing life, Beginning Now!

A Simple Exercise, To Get You Started:

Think of a skill, trait, or interest of yours that has been true of you from the beginning. Perhaps you have always been funny, or inquisitive, or a good writer, or a person who liked to draw, or someone who liked music and/or dancing, or who was shy, or who was a great brother or sister to your siblings.

Close your eyes and see your younger self being that person, doing that activity, using that innate skill that you have always had. Notice how much pleasure it brings you to see that little one, in all of their innocence, dancing in the living room, coloring with crayons, or helping out at home.

And then take a moment to think about how much you still like to dance, or color, or help, or learn, or have fun. See yourself doing this activity, now, and then notice how little has changed, for you.

All of the things that were great about you are still true and still great.

All of the things that you loved to do, you still love.

And the childlike joy that those activities brought you still bring you joy.

Welcome home.

B.) Step #2: Sharing My Struggles

As I said, we connect at the level of our struggles. We all (wrongly) think that we are very different than others and that our struggles separate us from others.

In truth, we all face very similar struggles, as we move through life, and our tendency to judge our struggles, instead of sharing them, keeps us from finding that out!

So, Step #2 in the process will always involve claiming your struggles, without judging them, and then choosing the people in your life with whom you can safely share them.

This is a truly liberating process! And in that process, you will come to realize how much of your time and energy you used to waste, pretending to be somebody you're not. You will also notice that you suddenly have a lot more energy for tackling the parts of your life that really do matter.

That is a very fun process. I can't wait for you to get started!

A Simple Exercise, To Get You Started:

Ask a person you trust to do this simple exercise with you. Tell them about a struggle that you are having, while they listen and ask questions, until they are sure that they understand.

Then, ask them to share a struggle that they have had that was similar to the one that you just described.

When they have finished, ask them to share a struggle that they are currently having, while you listen and ask questions, to make sure that you understand.

When you do understand, share with them a struggle that you have had that was similar to the one that they are now experiencing.

At the end, thank them for being a part of your learning process and notice these two important facts:

we have very similar struggles!

And sharing them with a trusted friend leaves us feeling closer to them.

C.) Step #3: Making Time

The opposite of keeping people at a distance is making time to connect with the people you love. I told you that Step #2 would indeed release a lot of new energy inside of you. It is a joyful experience to use some of that new energy to connect with people in a whole new way.

As a part of that “whole new way,” I will be teaching you things about truly listening, parenting, problem solving, leadership, and empathy that really will transform every relationship you have.

But first, we have to start at the beginning: we have to create the times when we can practice operating in that “whole new way.”

A Simple Exercise, To Get You Started:

With My Kids

I’ve heard lots of parents say things like, “I don’t get to spend a lot of time with my kids but when we do spend time together, it’s quality time.”

Here’s why that doesn’t make any sense: kids need quantity time! They need to see you every day, if possible, they need to have daily rituals with you that they find to be fun, loving, or comforting, and they need to share with you all of the little things that happened in their day, every day. For a child, **that’s** what love looks like.

What we call “quality time” they call “entertainment.”

So many adults, when they describe their growing up years, say things like, “Well, I know that my mom/dad must have loved me . . .” and then their voices trail off. They believed, on the idea level, that their parent must have cared about them, but they never actually felt it, experienced it, or really knew it, for sure. That’s sad.

It really comes down to this: there is no substitute for quantity time.

If you received that sort of “quantity time love” in your childhood, it’s important that you continue the tradition. If you didn’t, it’s important that you consciously choose to do things differently, this time around.

Every parent wants a better life for our children. This is what “better” looks like.

Our. Children. Need. Our. Time. Lots of it

When my daughter, Rachel was 11, she and I started having “Rachel and Dad Night” on Wednesday nights. We went out to eat, talked, and did whatever else sounded fun to us that night. That was such a great experience that we still do it!

That worked great for us. What works for you will probably be totally different, depending on your child’s interests, the number of other kids in the family, how much time you have to work with, and your family’s budget.

If your child loves to be your little helper, your “special time” together could be as simple as going grocery shopping together each week. S/he can help you to make the list of the things you need, check items off of the list as you buy them, look for bargains, and generally be as big a part of that process as they can be, for their age.

If the two of you share an interest, you can do that together. For example, when I was a kid, our dad (who loved to learn) took us with him to the library every Friday night, which was great. We walked together to the library, sat together reading books, and walked home together. While we were at the library I could show him books I was thinking of checking out and on the walk to and from I could be physically active and talk to my dad, which was a good combination for me, as it is for lots of kids.

The list of things you can do together is endless. If your child tells you “swimming is my life” then by all means hit the pool or lake as often as you can.

If your child is in gymnastics, yes, by all means go to watch their meets (while going to as few practices as possible, so that your child can develop a sense of independence in a way that is safe). But don’t just settle for that. Develop a routine of taking them to meets for older kids, so that they can learn/be inspired and then discuss with you all that they are seeing and learning.

If your child is a science nut, you can hit the science museum every Saturday morning, watch a fascinating You Tube science video every night before bed, or read books together about simple little science experiments you can do together at home.

If your child just got a new bike, the two of you could explore a new trail each week.

If there is a certain (board or video) game that your child likes to play, you could learn to play and then have “Challenge Matches” once a week.

If your child likes animals, the two of you could walk the dog together every day, you help them to start their own little dog walking business (if they are a bit older), or volunteer at the animal shelter each week.

If you wanted your child to learn to care for others, the two of you could volunteer on a weekly community project (which builds the relationship and their character). A project that involved helping younger kids would be an especially powerful way for your child to learn the importance of giving back.

Anything that creates regular times when your child has your undivided attention will work well.

With My Significant Other

All too often, when I ask a couple, “when is your daily connecting time?” I get a condescending look and a comment about how they “live in the real world” where there simply isn’t enough time to connect with one another every day.

These couples are telling me (and themselves) the sneakiest and most convincing type of lie – the kind where we tell the truth, except backwards. They are telling me that they would love to be more intimately connected to each other, if only they weren’t so busy. In truth, they stay really busy, as a way to make sure that they don’t have time together!

If I am playing passive TAG, where the goal is to avoid becoming IT, the best thing to do is to avoid any truly personal conversations. If I never share my true thoughts, feelings, or wants with people, I can never be criticized, right?

And since my significant other is exactly the person who is most likely to ask about my true thoughts, feelings, and wants, those are precisely the conversations I most want to avoid!

The person who loves me the most becomes the person I am least likely to talk to!

If there is a person in your life who always has time to help everybody else, at the expense of never being home, this is why. The same goes for the person who is always at work, always out with friends, always on their phone/computer when they are home, or always busy doing something. Being “too busy” to interact on a personal level is their (passive) way of avoiding becoming IT.

The first way to combat the “we are way too busy” form of passive TAG is to pick a time to connect, every day. It can be helpful to put a bit of structure on this time, at least at first. For instance, you both might say what the best and hardest parts of your day were and why those were the best and worst parts.

If you are both really smart, you will each listen carefully, without judgment or criticism. That way, over time, the two of you will quit looking for reasons not to connect and start looking forward to those times when you can connect.

In other words, you will start to experience the joy of living in right relationship.

D.) Step #4: Looking For The Good

With My Kids

When we play any active version of TAG, we focus on what our child does wrong, instead of on what s/he does right.

I'm a big believer in "The 90-10 Rule," which states that we all do things right about 90% of the time and mess up about 10% of the time. Because this is true, you would think that our most natural reaction would be to notice the many things that our child does right, since they things right 90% of the time!

But here's where it gets tricky. Our brains and our nervous systems are built to notice changes and exceptions – that's what has kept us out of harm's way since the beginning of time. If the weather stays constant, there is little reason to pay attention to it. But if the wind suddenly shifts, we need to notice that and take some sort of action to keep ourselves safe. The same is true if the silence is broken by an animal noise, the previously solid ground begins to sink under our feet, a child starts to cry, or a dark shape starts to move toward us.

We are wired to sense a change in circumstances and to react accordingly.

That was all fine, when we were living in a difficult and dangerous environment.

But the problem is that we are still wired that way. And so, if your child is polite, as they usually are, you not only won't compliment them for being so respectful, you won't even notice that they are doing it. Until that one time when they don't, at which point they receive from you some sort of sharp, critical response about their "attitude."

This creates a sudden change in their world, which triggers their sharpest, "I have to protect myself" response. And so the active version of the game called Constant TAG starts – a loud, angry series of arguments, in which each person is focused only on proving to the other person that they are wrong – they are the one who is IT.

If these arguments happen often enough, your child comes to expect from you nothing but negative feedback and develops the belief that "I can never do anything right" when s/he is around you. S/he is therefore already primed to respond in the Constant TAG manner, even before you speak. In that already-charged state, all it takes is one critical word from you to trigger their adrenaline-driven instincts, at which point they begin to lash out at you, either externally or internally, as a way of protecting themselves from the harm that they expect to receive from you.

In the end, your child will be constantly critical of you, which, ironically, is exactly what they perceive you to be doing.

Then, after enough of these shockingly hurtful interactions, they (and you!) will start making a point avoiding each other, so as to eliminate those ugly interactions.

In other words, as a result of your playing this form of active TAG, the two of you will eventually shift into playing passive TAG. Pretty soon thereafter, there will be nothing happening at all between the two of you.

And, as you will come to know, nothing kills a relationship faster than nothing.

My former client, Tim, once said “Anytime my dad came to one of my baseball games, I knew that afterwards I wouldn’t hear anything from him about the hits I got, the nice throws I made, or the fun I was having. I was only going to hear about the time I struck out. After a while, I quit telling him when the games were, so that I didn’t have to deal with that.”

The consistent focus on the 10% leads to bad interactions, which eventually leads to no interactions.

Your child does indeed need your loving affirmation. All too often, though, s/he gets your knee-jerk approval (or disapproval), instead. This will teach your child that they are only worth what they achieve. Once they conclude that this sort of conditional love is all that they are going to ever receive from you, they will quit looking to you for real love. Mostly, they will quit interacting with you at all.

So, it’s fine to say, “That was a fun walk.” But that’s not an affirmation of the child – it’s an affirmation of the activity – the walking. That’s OK, but it’s far more powerful for your child to hear something like:

“I had fun hanging out with you.”

“I always love our walks together.”

“It’s always great talking to you.”

“I really like being a sounding board for you.”

“I love to spend time with you.”

“I always look forward to our special times together.”

Those sentences all have one thing in common: they are about your child. They will help your child to know that they are important to you, that you enjoy being with them, and that your time with them is precious to you.

These sorts of sentences will help your child to feel great, in that moment, and will also help them to recognize real love when they see/hear/experience it in the future.

As a result, they will have a head start on living in right relationships with others, when they grow up! Truly that is the greatest gift you could possibly give to a child.

With My Significant Other

Imagine that you are looking at your partner carefully, noticing everything there is to see about them. Then imagine putting your hand directly in front of your face. What will you see, then?

Only your hand, right? It will be as if all of your partner’s features have disappeared completely. Except that they haven’t really changed, of course.

The hand that blocks your view of them is just like the resentments that you have been carrying around. Those resentments keep you from seeing the other person clearly. All you can see is the resentments. So, you tell yourself that the other person has changed for the worse. But that’s a lie. The only thing that has changed is your ability to see them clearly.

Everything that once was good about them, everything that attracted you to them in the first place, is still true. In fact, they have probably gotten even better at all of those things over time.

Today, I would like for you (and them, if they are willing) to make a list of everything about the other person that is precious to you. It could be a big thing, like their sense of humor, or a little thing, like the sweet joke they made yesterday.

Then, before this day is over, I would ask that you sit by each other, turn towards each other, hold hands, and take turns reading your lists to each other.

And I would ask that you continue doing this, every day.

This might feel a bit artificial or uncomfortable, at least at first.

If so, please remember this: the behaviors that feel comfortable are those that we have been doing, up until now. And they haven't worked.

In this process, the goal is NOT to remain as you are – permanently comfortable and totally unhappy. The goal is to be temporarily uncomfortable, which will allow you to become totally happy.

E.) Step #5: Moving Toward Resolution

In the game of TAG, we try to “win” an argument or conversation by putting down, criticizing, or judging the other person. As I pointed out previously, this will always lead to the sorts of increasingly frequent, on-going, toxic arguments that characterize a TAG-playing relationship.

If we want to create loving relationships, instead, it is critically important that we learn to solve problems in a way that honors the other person.

This step is fundamental to a healthy relationship. Any form of right relationship is build upon trust and one element of trust is the belief that I am safe with you.

If you might tear me down, any time that we disagree, I am not safe with you.

If you treat me gently, even when we disagree, then I feel safe with you.

And that’s how we build trust. Or not.

A Simple Exercise, To Get You Started:

On the home page of the web site, there is a brief audio file, entitled “Rant #7: You’re Not Listening!” I would ask that you listen to that audio, as a way to start moving in a whole different direction, in terms of handling your disagreements.

Please listen to that and let me know what you think.

F.) Step #6: Claiming What I Want

As I noted, earlier in this book, TAG-players have a lot of trouble knowing and embracing their vision.

As a result, when I ask them, “What is your vision?” or “What is it that you want?” they look at me blankly. After a while, I realized that I was getting the blank look because I was actually asking the wrong question. My bad!

When I would ask, “What do you want?” their brain did not start working on **that** question. It started working on a different question – “Do I even know what I want?”

Their question would paralyze them and lead, at best, to a “Yes or no” answer, as opposed to an answer that described their vision in any sort of detail.

So, now I ask a different question – “What is it that you know you want?”

A Simple Exercise, To Get You Started:

Grab a pen and paper (or, your laptop, if you’re not as old school as I am), sit quietly, and ask yourself, “What is it that I know I want?”

And then write down everything that comes to you, as fast as you can write it down.

Later, we can use this to help you to get more clear about your short-term and long-term visions.

For right now, we just want to get you started.

So, ask the question and start writing!

G.) Step #7: Choosing Peace and Joy

Peace and joy are what you will naturally feel, as soon as you begin to let go of the TAG-driven anxiety that you have struggled with, up until now.

Sometimes, my students ask me, “What can I do, to start feeling more at peace and more joyful?” Often, there seems to be an expectation that I am going to provide them with the “one size fits all” answer to that question.

In truth, however, the answer is different for every person.

Your answer to the question will be different than anyone else’s answer.

Luckily, you already know part of the answer.

A Simple Exercise, To Get You Started:

Please take a moment and list all of the times that you can remember feeling at peace.

It might have been for a period of your life (when you just started dating) or for a brief moment (when you were singing that song you like). It doesn’t matter. Please make a point to list every time that you can remember having been at peace.

When you are done, I would ask that you look over the list and ask yourself two questions:

1.) What are the themes here?

Maybe several of the examples occurred when you were outdoors, or when you were with a certain friend, or engaged in a certain sacred activity, or reading a certain kind of book, or in a certain place. Just notice any patterns that seem to occur.

2.) How could I implement at least one of these, right now?

Please choose one of those themes or patterns and make a commitment to start doing more of that (spending time outdoors, with a certain friend, doing a certain activity, etc.), this day and this week. This will get you started on the journey to joy and peace.

7) IN CONCLUSION

I am very excited to be on this journey with you. I would encourage you to continue this journey, in whatever way would be best for you.

No matter what, I hope that you keep listening to the new rants on the website and sharing your comments with me. I would love to know what you find helpful and why.

You can also receive personalized training from me, sign up for a seminar, or be a part of the development of the TAG test.

No matter what route you choose, please remember this: it's not just about you.

I say that because there will be times when it will be hard to keep moving forward – when it will be tempting to slide back into your old behavior patterns.

It will be especially easy to make this mistake when you are Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired (HALT, as we say).

At these times, when you are finding it difficult to choose to stay on your new, better path, I would ask that you stop and picture:

Your life getting better,
the lives of all your loved ones getting better,
and the lives of their loved ones getting better.

Every day that you choose to do it “the whole new way” is a day that you are positively impacting your life, their lives, and all of those other lives.

What you are doing REALLY matters, to you and to them.

Because relationships really ARE all that matter!

Yours AND theirs.

Because being in right relationship IS what makes us and them happy.

Are you ready to be happy? For your sake and for theirs?

If you are, I can't wait to start teaching you all of the things that I have learned in my 40-year quest to understand the obstacles and paths to living in right relationship.

I look forward to our working together.

You take care.

- - - Glenn