

Chapter 1

HOW DID THIS EVER HAPPEN?

The Process of Breaking Up

We had had problems for years. She threatened to divorce me on a regular basis. This time Tamara wrote me a letter and demanded I move out. I could have prevented this, but this pattern of coming and going had been our style since we dated. I don't want to lose my family or be a failure.

—Matt, age fifty-six,
married for twenty-eight years, divorced

We dated for seven years. We were engaged for three years and lived together for two, and he left me. I knew we had issues but I always thought we would work them out. We went to therapy and I thought we were making progress. Then I found out Brad had an affair with his personal trainer at the gym. I am still devastated—six months later!

—Tracy, age thirty-nine, single and dating again

THE ENDING

Picking up this book will be the beginning of a great journey. The trip will require of you things that you might not expect

but that you truly need. It will start with your complete honesty and end with finding within yourself your own personal truth and courage. You picked up this book because you have had an intense relationship crisis, a traumatic breakup, an unforeseen loss, and/or a great disappointment in your adult romantic life. But regardless of how devastated, emotionally betrayed, bitter, angry, hateful of the opposite sex, and hopeless you feel, deep down in your heart you still deep down in your heart in relationships and their curative nature and power.

Intimate relationships are the gold standard by which we measure success or disappointment in our lives. Business and careers will come and go, but nothing is more timeless than the experience of a solid marriage, a lifelong partner, and a loving relationship. A scholar once said that your life is the summation of all your relationships. I would also like to add it is the ongoing summation of all your intimate love relationships. Regardless of the despair, fear, and disappointment that you have experienced, you can recover your sense of well-being and build a new relationship life that better fits who and what you are today.

Despite the disappointment, embarrassment, and heartbreaking pain, we cannot get away from the fact that *love relationships matter*. We all know it, and that truth never changes. We never truly stop attempting to re-create deep emotional attachments when relationships end. Ironically, it is in trying to recover and overcome the heartbreak that we often set up the roadblocks that will damage our future love relationships. *The underlying problem and crisis in not resolving your ex-factor issues, is the “pain” will continue to persist in your life.* The key is not to take the prior disappointments and bitterness wrapped up in your relationship with your ex-husband/wife/lover with you into your next intimate relationship. You can't bring your ex-husband on your honeymoon. It will never work. Again, you know this—but how do you stop recycling your pain and disappointment? This question will be repeatedly addressed, examined from all possible perspectives, and answered

and explained thoroughly throughout this book. The short answer is that you can stop making the same self-defeating choices; creating the same painful attachments; and getting caught up in the same old patterns of abuse and loveless, codependent romantic connections.

Never before has the concept of the “ex” been so significant to families, children, new marriages, and future partners. According to a November 2007 article appearing in *Time* magazine, approximately 66 to 70 percent of all American families are some type of blended family combination.¹ Blended families are those in which children live with one biological parent part of the time. Being a blended family has nothing to do with marital status but rather the birth parents not living together with their biological or adopted children. Second marriages, two adults co-habituating, stepchildren, no new children, new wives, new husbands, and in-laws are all impacted by this growing social family phenomenon. Overcoming your heartbreak is essential to the possibility of creating future intimate relationships. Divorce or emotional rejection by a lover isn't the death sentence it once was to future intimate relationships potential. Now, emotional despair and disappointment can be catalysts for a more fulfilling relationship future and for creating the type of family that you desire. The emotional and psychological ability to move forward in your life after heartbreak is as important as your physical health. The ending of a relationship isn't the final stop in your romantic adult life, but rather a fork in the road of your life. In today's world, you have romantic choices and new opportunities that once were not even considered possible.

EX-FACTOR FACTS

An article in the January 24, 2008, edition of *Time* magazine states, “Married people live longer and are healthier throughout those extra (over 62) years; Studies have linked marriage to lower rates of cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory disease and mental illness;

Marriage helps both spouses cope better with stress, though men benefit more than women.”² There is no doubt—medically, psychologically, or biologically—that we are wired for emotional attachment and intimate loving relationships. Men typically report the highest levels of satisfaction in long-term relationships. Women report being more emotionally content and less anxious in marriage-type love relationships than women who aren’t in such relationships. It doesn’t take a federal grant or a university research project to know that the opposite holds true for men and women when their love relationships end. The end of any type of romantic relationship is emotionally, mentally, and physically devastating for all parties concerned. No one is spared the rod of emotional pain when a relationship ends in divorce or in broken engagement.

One of the major premises of the ex-factor is that *there is no such thing as a relationship failure*. The fact that your marriage ended doesn’t mean you failed as a wife, mother, woman, husband, father, or man. It means that the relationship ran out its natural time line and is now over. Every relationship has a timetable. You will have to draw on on tremendous courage and weather severe emotional pain (unfortunate, but it is always present) to process the relationship and move forward with your life. *Endings don’t equal failure!* Failure is the inability to realize that your prior belief system about relationships and how you operated in them needs to be expanded, changed, and reevaluated. Relationships change, and this is a natural process, like all things in life.

Endings are endings—nothing more or less—and it is what you ascribe to them that is paramount. The amount of shame and guilt you feel, as well as your prior relationship history, play a very large role in your present-day struggles and grief. Your current breakup can reactivate feelings of loss and rejection you’ve felt your whole life. Remember the heartbreak from your first romantic crush? It was a big event then, and heartbreaks today are no different. In fact, relationship endings are *cumulative* when we ignore them and carry them with us into our next intimate relationship. Do you *really*

know what you have accumulated along your romantic path? The potential of your future relationships hinges on your ability, insight, courage, and desire to separate your past from your present. Your emotional, psychological, and physical health are greatly impacted by your ability to keep the past from recurring.³ You are the only one who can determine whether your ex-factor will be a positive legacy or an ongoing drama/tension-filled soap opera. You *don't* want to be the star in your own soap. You don't want the emotional drama, arguing, and raging conversations with your ex in front of the kids or in front of your new partner. If this type of drama is happening, you are bringing old behaviors from your past relationship endings and disappointments into your current romantic experience.

Relationships can end abruptly, slowly, suddenly, or traumatically—for reasons that husbands, wives, and lovers often ignore, deny, or avoid until the relationship has dissolved or “blown up.” It is the emotional and psychological damage caused by these tragic endings that is so problematic and so difficult for adults to fathom. The goal of this entire discussion (book) is to help you learn to resolve your traumatic relationship endings and move your current or future relationship forward in the direction that you desire. Recycling old relationship material every time you meet someone of significant romantic interest is self-defeating and pointless. It is extremely problematic, emotionally frustrating, and nauseating to continually repeat your personal history of romantic encounters. Unfortunately, replaying old relationship patterns is very common.

EMOTIONAL SEVERITY

It is the severe emotional toll of a marriage's (any type of romantic relationship) ending combined with a three-year bloodbath divorce that leaves all the participants psychologically reeling for years. The couple ends up spending thousands of dollars arguing over who gets the rosebushes, the airline miles, and the kids on Christmas and