

## HOW RELATING REALLY WORKS

**How to make a complex matter simpler  
and improve your insights on relating!**

The following pages are all about relating – and it's kept brief. Anyone with a real interest in the topic will be able to make good sense of what follows and can decide on its value. An extended version is available. However, with busy lives the simple often suits the best.

**Learn about relating in three steps.**

1. *Basic Facts about Relating* – How people *are* relational and what that means.
2. *A Relational Model* – Six dynamics with outcomes and determining factors.
3. *Wilson Road* – 13 relational stories of family life and a business situation.

**Relating is more than a skill – it's an attitude!**

**How do you unpack that?  
Read on, and find out!**

by Michael Spyker © 2008

Additional information, that supports the ideas and concepts that follow, may be obtained from [QRF-Relate.com/additional/](http://QRF-Relate.com/additional/)

## **Basic Facts about Relating**

*A brief explanation of what relating actually is about!*

People are wired to relate. It is an essential part of what being a person means. Relating may be made more effective by acquiring skills, but the essence of it originates from deep within – from the human spirit. **Relating is a spiritual activity that concerns attitudes and motivations.** It is possible to make sense of that and gain valuable insights.

**The three aspects of personhood are nature, self-determination and singularity.** Nature represents what a person is like, self-determination how a person decides to act and singularity how integrated a person has become. As relating is an activity that involves the whole person comprehensive insights on relating should reflect each of these three aspects of personhood in a fundamental way. To be helpful an explanation should be readily comprehensible.

On this basis **three primary dynamics are found for *positive* relating** that may be easily understood. When they work adequately the relating is good and if not, there will be trouble. These dynamics are:

1. *Love/Care*
2. *Authority/Responsibility*
3. *Unity/Integrity*

Unfortunately, there is a negative side to personhood and **people can express relational dynamics that are quite the opposite.** The positives will have to fight against their negative counterparts continually. These negative dynamics are:

1. *Dictatorship/Oppression*
2. *Desertion/Neglect*
3. *Disharmony/Manipulation*

As a person I will either

1. *Care, be Responsible and have Integrity* OR
2. *Oppress, Neglect and Manipulate*

**In all relating these six dynamics are potentially present.**

**Each of these six relational dynamics is active in the human spirit continually.** Relating never stops. When not interacting with another person or the environment, people will relate to themselves. They are forever coming to grips with their own psyche, which is a relational activity. Self-talk is an example of that. It is important to look after yourself, to treat yourself kindly and with care. All this is relational.

**Relational dynamics have outcomes for better or worse.** They shape the identity and the environment of a person. Everyone carries a relational imprint from being exposed to relating and everyone projects relational energy towards others. How that works is complex, but may be explained by using a simple relational model. The model shows in a few steps the outcomes of each of the six relational dynamics and how those are achieved. Every relational interaction is a mix of these six dynamics and the aim is to have the positive overcome the negative. Then the relational mix that is projected in an interaction helps build people up rather than pull them down. **By relating positively you will grow in personal wholeness yourself and will help others to do likewise.**

In a nutshell, **there are three simple questions to ask** that prevent a lot of heartache. When a personal situation becomes messy it means these questions are being ignored. The questions are easy – their application will take commitment.

1. *How do I best Care?*
2. *What is my real Responsibility?*
3. *How do I respond with Integrity?*

These questions apply at a personal level, an interpersonal level, in groups, in business, society and in government. The dynamics of relating are always the same and don't change depending on context.

Read on, and consider the model for yourself.  
But first a few comments about **Place-Making**.

## Place-Making

Place-Makers are people who invite others into in their relational space. Place-Makers say: 'Welcome into *my* space!' In expressing that, Place-Makers actually help people find their *own* relational space as well. They create a feeling of mutuality and acceptance. By being invited into relationship we are able to offer relationship.

**There are two sides to Place-Making**, the *passive* and the *active* side. The passive side is offered to me – or not – and I can do little about that. The active side is where I can be a Place-Maker myself. Each side has two key existential realities with outcomes.

### *The Passive Side – what is offered to me*

It invites me into a sense of **belonging** with people which helps my **becoming**. Such personal growth in turn assists me with an increased sense of belonging. Without a sense of real belonging and becoming people have identity problems. The psycho-spiritual outcomes are:

Belonging	→	Security
Becoming	→	Significance

### *The Active Side – what I can do*

Here I am the Place-Maker and *turn towards* others. I turn away from the negative and express the positive, even when not always feeling that way. I can turn towards myself positively as well rather than engaging in negative self-talk. My **turning** should be expressed in **relating**. The outcomes are a positive relational mindset and an effort to communicate well.

Turning	→	Positive Mindset
Relating	→	Meaningful Communication

**Why is this important?** Without an environment of Place-Making personal wholeness becomes so much harder. That begins at an early age – if parents are Place-Makers, the kids will be alright and will grow up with a healthy self-belief. Or, in adult life, if at work there is a Place-Making environment, company morale will be good. **Place-Making is a choice we make**, at least on the 'active' side. Let's hope the 'passive' side is indeed offered to us or turning and relating will become much more difficult.

**Place-Making is completely relational.** Good Place-Makers know what relating entails. They will be convinced of its importance and not give up. They're happy to learn.

## A Quality Relational Framework

The relational model to be presented is a framework that allows for reflection on what my relating is like and how I may improve it. It isn't an easy-fix answer template to relational problems but a tool for making more sense of relating. It will help relational ability.

**Knowing what's going on is half the battle won.**

The three positive relational dynamics will be called *Motivators*, while the three negatives are *Demoralisers*. Life puts demoralisers on our path frequently and don't we know it. Each relational dynamic has a specific outcome, though this demarcation between the six dynamics is just a way of making things understandable. In reality my relational energy is one undivided expression with potentially a complex mix of messages. These messages have their effects, very powerfully so, and that's why relating is such a serious business. These effects are a combination of what's involved with each relational dynamic and their final outcomes. The outcomes for motivators and demoralisers are:

### **3 Motivators**

<i>Love/Care</i>	→	<i>Compassion</i>
<i>Authority/Responsibility</i>	→	<i>Personal Freedom</i>
<i>Unity/Integrity</i>	→	<i>Wholeness</i>

### **3 Demoralisers**

<i>Dictatorship/Oppression</i>	→	<i>Rebellion</i>
<i>Desertion/Neglect</i>	→	<i>Anarchy</i>
<i>Disharmony/Manipulation</i>	→	<i>Psycho-spiritual Weakness</i>

For a relational dynamic like Love/Care to arrive at its final outcome a number of relational realities are involved that will be called *Outcome Determining Factors*. Each relational reality is important and can describe an intention, an action or an environment. In good relating this is taken seriously. Good relating will focus on the positive and makes sure to express that. **The Outcome Determining Factors aren't hard to understand or impossible to achieve.** It's quite common stuff and that's what makes the Quality Relational Framework potentially so effective.

The meaning of each Outcome Determining Factor now follows. Please note carefully. Thereafter the three *Motivators* and three *Demoralisers* are explained.

## A Quality Relational Framework

If the following explanation may seem a little technical please know that once shown within the context of the model the ideas will be easily understood and are user friendly.

### *Outcome Determining Factors*

1. *Fundamental Orientation*

It is the root cause of a relational expression and is reflected in the primary word given for it. For Motivator 1 it is Love.

2. *Primary Expression*

It indicates how the Fundamental Orientation is communicated. It is an action word. For Love the Primary Expression is Care.

3. *Technique*

It involves the method by which the Primary Expression is realised and the environment thus created

4. *Relational Interaction*

It expresses the intent of a communication, the principle message the other person will receive. It is Technique translated into a projection that is personally experienced.

5. *Basic Attitude*

It defines the kind of self that a person is expressing and is directly connected with Primary Expression and the consequential Technique. It is a central category.

6. *Existential Reality*

It describes what kind of place is available to the recipient of a communication. How it affects the person on the 'inside'. It is shaped by all the other factors together and determines the Primary Outcome.

7. *Primary Outcome*

It is the potential psycho-spiritual outcome of a relational dynamic when a person is consistently exposed to it. It is the long-term effect of a relational energy expression.

## **MOTIVATOR 1**     *Love/Care*

Expressing love in everyday relating is not a feeling but an intention of care. It can be *done!* It isn't reserved for significant others but is meant towards everyone and everything. Love is the most fundamental positive expression of the nature of personhood. It creates an embracing and safe environment in which the receiver of the interaction is helped in developing the ability to love, to practise compassion, in turn. In the context of the relational model love is an attitude that one can decide to have and foster. Everyone knows that at times it isn't that easy to care and to keep at it. It is, however, essential to persist.

### 1. *Fundamental Orientation*

- **LOVE**

I will think favourably of others and be merciful.

### 2. *Primary Expression*

- **Care**

I will provide for and watch over.

### 3. *Technique*

- **Kindness**

I will be patient and forgiving.

### 4. *Relational Interaction*

- **Understanding**

I will be humble and remember my own vulnerability.

### 5. *Basic Attitude*

- **Other-centeredness**

I have empathy and desire to be of help.

### 6. *Existential Reality*

- **Personal Development**

I am committed to your identity formation.

### 7. *Primary Outcome*

- **Compassion**

I will encourage you to care for others as you yourself wish to be cared for.

## **MOTIVATOR 2**    *Authority/Responsibility*

Authority has become a much maligned word with negative overtones. However, without a structure of authority anarchy will soon rule the day. Authority and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. Make sure to take responsibility in situations when the authority is yours. Don't opt out. You should be free to act considerately and with care. In personhood positive self-determination involves *responsible* freedom. This freedom develops by learning to live within relational boundaries that are of benefit to self and all. It prevents hurts and heartaches and allows for being as free a person as can properly be.

### 1. *Fundamental Orientation*

- **AUTHORITY**

I will use direction for the wellbeing of others and myself.

### 2. *Primary Expression*

- **Responsibility**

I will respond to the needs of others.

### 3. *Technique*

- **Discipline**

I will seek right application and restraint.

### 4. *Relational Interaction*

- **Enabling**

I will encourage maturity.

### 5. *Basic Attitude*

- **Dependability**

I will see matters through.

### 6. *Existential Reality*

- **Opportunity**

It will encourage self-control.

### 7. *Primary Outcome*

- **Freedom**

I will show you the way of personal liberty within the boundaries of wisdom.

### **MOTIVATOR 3    *Unity/Integrity***

Unity in the context of personhood means becoming an integrated personality, as well as being someone who seeks harmony rather than discontent. Not to say that such a motivation will sacrifice personally held value convictions. Agreeing to disagree is distinctly possible. The relational aim, however, remains towards respect for the other and a desire to understand that person. Only someone of integrity can function in this manner. There must be an openness that engenders trust and the relational environment must be consistent and predictable. Singular people like this are great to be with and engender wellbeing.

#### *1. Fundamental Orientation*

- **UNITY**

I will seek harmony where no ethical and moral principles are at stake.

#### *2. Primary Expression*

- **Integrity**

I will practise what I preach.

#### *3. Technique*

- **Consistency**

I will not be unpredictable in attitude and behaviour.

#### *4. Relational Interaction*

- **Appreciation**

I will show you respect.

#### *5. Basic Attitude*

- **Honesty**

I will practise openness.

#### *6. Existential Reality*

- **Support**

I seek to travel roads together.

#### *7. Primary Outcome*

- **Wholeness**

I will help you in finding an integrated personality.

## **All's well with the Positive.**

Relating is a nurturing activity. **What you sow, you will reap.** Unfortunately far too much of relating just happens and isn't evaluated. Relating is an attitude that carries a lot of meta-messages, messages that are perceived in an interaction rather than verbalised and may be different from what is said. It can have encouraging or devastating effects that usually aren't sufficiently understood. The relational model gives insights into that and shows the need for taking the quality of relating seriously. It needs constant reflection.

**The three primary outcomes of positive relating are a mix of true enablement.** Anyone exposed to it in its full force is a lucky and empowered person. Positive relating, when intentionally practised, will become an acquired habit, one that is integrated into personhood. **Remembering to care, be responsible and show integrity isn't that hard,** even in difficult times. Of course, mistakes will be made, but at least these are now understood as such. No longer will they hide under a cloak of ignorance.

**Here are the key questions to ask about positive relating for easy reference.**

1. Is my thinking affirmative?
2. Am I willing to care?
3. Do I have a role to play?
4. Am I acting with responsibility?
5. Can I see the boundaries clearly?
6. Am I showing integrity

Unfortunately, all's not well with humanity and the negative cannot be ignored. Positive relating has its counterpart that automatically becomes active when not opposed. These opposite forces are called *Demoralisers* and it is the second part of the relational model.

In relating **it is essential to concentrate on the positive** which will then nullify the negative. **It is also essential for the negative to be properly understood** and never to be underestimated. It is a powerful relational force with dire consequences. How the three *Demoralisers* work and their outcomes is presented next.

## *DEMORALISER 1 Dictatorship/Oppression*

When a relational attitude leans towards dominance and aggression it results in dictatorship and the oppression of people. In relating there's a difficulty at this point. People can be oppressive in their relating with the idea that they are doing it 'for the best,' out of care. It's a subtle illusion. Caring in a way that make people feel swamped relationally is not the care of love, which liberates and feels good even when a message may contain an order or reprimand. Excessive exposure to dictatorial relating, however disguised, finally will result in anger with the recipient. Be careful! Ask others whether they find you oppressive at times. Evaluate that honestly.

### *1. Fundamental Orientation*

- **DICTATORSHIP**

I will have my way with little regard for others.

### *2. Primary Expression*

- **Oppression**

I am the enforcer of issues.

### *3. Technique*

- **Rule**

My demands will be met.

### *4. Relational Interaction*

- **Compliance**

I do not accept objections.

### *5. Basic Attitude*

- **Dominance**

You will succumb.

### *6. Existential Reality*

- **Confinement**

I can overpower you.

### *7. Primary Outcome*

- **Rebellion**

Your anger doesn't concern me.

## *DEMORALISER 2 Desertion/Neglect*

How easy it is to mentally walk away from a relational interaction unless you take being accountable for other people seriously. Like dictatorship, such neglect comes in subtle guises. It's easy to get away with. You may fool yourself that it's okay. But the person exposed to your disinterest will feel it acutely. They may have learned to deal with it for relational neglect is common and happens all the time. Such is life. However, that doesn't make it right. When a person is confronted continually with a serious attitude of relational desertion in a significant other anarchy appears. 'If you don't care, why should I?' will be the powerless cry. Personal identity has been weakened into an indiscriminate lashing out.

### *1. Fundamental Orientation*

- **DESERTION**  
I refuse to be responsible.

### *2. Primary Expression*

- **Neglect**  
I can turn my back on you.

### *3. Technique*

- **License**  
I leave you to your choices.

### *4. Relational Interaction*

- **Being left at bay**  
I will not protect you.

### *5. Basic Attitude*

- **Irresponsibility**  
I do not value you.

### *6. Existential Reality*

- **Abandonment**  
I will not be found.

### *7. Primary Outcome*

- **Anarchy**  
Destructiveness is not my worry.

### **DEMORALISER 3 Disharmony/Manipulation**

Manipulation is the third of the relational negatives. It refuses to address others with the intention of empowerment but rather seeks to undermine it. Manipulation infiltrates a person's identity structures and tries to take control. 'I will not let you make up your mind for yourself. You will feel beholden to my request.' It is subtle psychological warfare and quite often goes undetected. It often seems so innocuous. Most people don't even realise it when they are being manipulative. The most effective mental response is, 'I'm now being manipulated. I won't buy into it and will make up my own mind.' Just say that to yourself. Long-term manipulation disintegrates the identity of the person exposed to it.

1. *Fundamental Orientation*

- **DISHARMONY**  
I do not seek companionship.

2. *Primary Expression*

- **Manipulation**  
I will emotionally misuse you.

3. *Technique*

- **Lure**  
I will draw you in underhandedly.

4. *Relational Interaction*

- **Appeasement**  
I will set you to my personal advantage.

5. *Basic Attitude*

- **Coercion**  
I will pressure and persuade you.

6. *Existential Reality*

- **Blackmail**  
I will exploit your emotions and fears.

7. *Primary Outcome*

- **Weakness**  
Your vulnerability and disintegration don't concern me.

Some people have entrenched habits of negative relating which express their utter selfishness without fail. They destroy much in other people. For children to have a parent like that is devastating. Whole societies can suffer relationally under a dictatorship, as happens all too often. Everyone is exposed to negative relating – we do it ourselves as well – but usually it’s far less pronounced. Life with its pressures and tiredness, desires and disappointments, may find us becoming relationally negative at times. That’s quite okay. Just make sure it doesn’t last and apologise when matters have become a little unsavoury.

**Here are the key questions to ask about negative relating for easy reference.**

1. Do I feel aggressive?
2. Am I being forceful?
3. Can I be bothered?
4. Am I opting out?
5. Am I devaluing others?
6. Am I manipulative?

### **Relational Imprint**

Being a person means being relational. It’s a precondition of personhood. **And every person carries a relational imprint.** It is determined by the kind of relating that has happened to you and writes hidden messages into your spirit. It colours the relational responses you give out. There are two important points here. Firstly, make sure your relating is of a quality that ensures a healthy relational imprint in others. It will make or break their enjoyment of life, plus your own, and that’s no overstatement. Secondly, be confident of undoing the negative side of the relational imprint you carry by focusing on positive relating and positive self-talk. In doing so the negative will lose its power, though it may take some time. Perhaps you should look at the six pages of the model and highlight the words and ideas you find particularly meaningful. You might memorize the key relational questions given in the Quality Relational Framework. There is nothing more liberating than a healthy relational attitude. Achieving that involves the kind of gain that really outweighs the pain by a mile.

### **Important!**

**For really dysfunctional relating make sure to engage a health professional.**

Before presenting *Wilson Road*, in which the relational insights are contextualised in story form, now following are some questions a company might ask when confronted with significant relational situations. It’s simple but comprehensive, and a good start.

## **Relational Questions for Group Situations**

Competent relational practice is a balance sheet enhancer. Most grief experienced in a group or company environment is the result of bad relating. The questions below address relational attitudes rather than techniques. Questions about relational skills may be added. The right *disposition* is the beginning of success. Even the best skills are hollow if attitude leaves to be desired. People will soon figure it out and become skeptical. That's a serious relational pitfall. It applies to every level of an organisation. Here are the steps by which to minimise such relational infections. It means not that the hard decisions aren't made, rather that they are made from a decent relational platform.

### **First, have a Situational Analysis.**

- What exactly is the nature of the situation?
- Which major issues does it raise?
- Who are the people most affected by it?
- What are the prevailing attitudes across the board?

### **Then, consider each of the Positive Relational Dynamics and their application**

#### **CARE**

- How are non-judgmental perspectives best achieved?
- Who have been hurt or might become so?
- How can hurt be minimised?

#### **RESPONSIBILITY**

- Who are actually responsible in the situation?
- What exactly are these responsibilities?
- Who might misinterpret a responsible decision and how is that best addressed?

#### **INTEGRITY**

- In what manner might integrity be at stake?
- How is an environment of trust maintained?
- Who might question that trust and how is that best responded to?

Chapter 13 of *Wilson Road* gives a practical business example.

## **Wilson Road**

These thirteen short stories about relating will make you smile perhaps. Amelia and Peter, and their children Sarah and Henry, experience what all families do in living together. In the last story Peter tries to sort a problem at work that needs his attention.

These are everyday stories about everyday relational situations. Peter and Amelia are trying to respond better to each other and their children by applying ideas from the Quality Relational Framework. They are getting a better handle on how to help each other feel good about their lives together. All isn't roses, but there's improvement. Amelia and Peter find a new vibrancy in their relationship and are helping their children develop with a healthy relational imprint.

Each story begins with a brief statement about its intent and ends with three questions for reflection or possibly discussion. It's not a matter of finding the right answer, but of engaging with the relational dynamics presented.

**Read, and enjoy – and reflect a little.**

## **Wilson Road**

1. A smile with real meaning p. 18
2. Do I really want to do this? p. 20
3. It's only a phone-call p. 22
4. Becoming understood p. 24
5. The human food processor p. 26
6. Skateboarding misadventure p. 28
7. Just a little garden job p. 30
8. The cost of a bargain p. 32
9. What if? p. 34
10. DVD troubles p. 36
11. A matter of trust p. 38
12. It's a deal p. 40
13. A business situation p. 42

## Storyline

All's not as it used to be in Peter's family at *Wilson Road*. Time grinds relationships down and Peter wonders about it. What does loving your family mean when you're tired, don't feel affectionate, and the rubber hits the road?

### 1. *A smile with real meaning*

'Come on,' Peter muttered under his breath and turned the steering wheel to avoid a bumper touch. 'I hate this road,' he thought. He was on his way home from work. It had been a cow of a day. His thoughts weren't exactly on the traffic and this sudden moment of reaction sharpened his focus – somewhat. Peter wasn't thinking of work although there was plenty to worry about there. It was the home front that busied his mind and his feelings. With Amelia, and Sarah, and Henry.

Peter loved them very much, but wondered whether his emotions had flattened out more than was healthy. Family life was hard work. Perhaps he was just tired.

Last week, for a brief moment, an enormous surge of love had come flooding in. So much that he'd wiped a few tears away. It had happened unannounced while working in the garden and thinking of his wife; creative, impulsive Amelia, who could smile a thousand different smiles. Of course, he loved his family. He just couldn't always muster feelings of noticeable affection in dealing with the stuff of family life. It was always so busy, living side by side, with the usual pressure and friction that made the machinery squeak. Feelings of love? What was that supposed to be like in the daily grind?

And there was the rub. Peter braked harder than normal, grateful for driving a modern car that could deal with it effortlessly. Someone had cut in before him, without giving notice. Forty minutes getting home through peak traffic! His nerves, after a long day, would usually be on edge by the time he reached his driveway. It was always good to arrive home, sometimes good to escape.

They had decided to enrol in a course on relating spread over a month or two. It had been Amelia's idea. Perhaps she felt something was amiss between them though that wasn't how she explained it. 'We can learn,' she had said, 'and it's important. Do it for me and the children.'

'But am I that bad?' he had objected.

'No, you're fine.' And Amelia had smiled, a smile with meaning that could signify a lot of things.

So, yesterday they went for the first evening which hadn't been bad; rather promising really. Peter particularly remembered hearing that a good relational attitude makes up for a lot of inadequacies if you apply some key relational principles. Amelia had been unusually quiet. The outcome, he was told, is wellbeing for yourself and those in your care. Feelings are important, but

not everything. Responding *correctly* to situations is the key. If you don't feel love, you can still express love by caring. That's one insight that stuck into Peter's mind. The ideas overall seemed okay and probably rather timely. Next week would show more.

'Why does Henry always have to dump his bike in the middle of their small front lawn?' Peter thought irritably, as he drove in. One day someone is bound to nick it. 'Not so,' Henry would proclaim, with the wisdom of a 10 year old. 'Who'd want it?'

Welcome home Dad, at Wilson Road.

### *Reflections*

- Realising that love isn't a feeling predominantly helps. Why?
- Why might I be reluctant to learn more about relating?
- What's my general attitude to relating like anyway?

## **Storyline**

Amelia's emotional defences against the vagaries of life are becoming a little shaky. She's also facing a daughter who is growing up. Amelia reflects on the future and the place of relationships. What's wisdom?

### **2. *Do I really want to do this?***

Amelia had made a coffee and now bit into some cake. Perhaps it would cheer her up a little. Not that anything terrible had happened, but keeping her usually happy countenance had become increasingly a struggle lately. 'I'm simply too complex,' she reflected, and felt a deep shadow drift over her soul. It frightened and unnerved her. Getting out of this mood needed some positive thinking. That remedy she had tried often before and, until recently, with considerable success. Seeing the bright side of life was the best way. Unfortunately, today, it didn't work.

Sarah, at fourteen, was beginning to compete on the female side of the family in all sorts of little ways. Nothing major. But being challenged, however insignificantly, was depressing to Amelia. It wasn't fun. It also asked for a wise response, which was easier said than done. Where do you draw the line? What is best overlooked? Which are the benchmarks? Amelia felt out of her depth and was afraid that the fun-loving relationship with her daughter had begun to slip away. 'Life's serious as well, mum,' Sarah once had blurted out. It left Amelia momentarily speechless. Not because she wasn't aware of the painful side of human existence. Her usual response was trying to focus on the positive instead. Sarah, unknowingly, hit a nerve.

Peter wasn't happy either. Things were getting on top of him. Nothing too drastic, but that natural confidence in the successes of life was fading. It made Amelia unhappy and increasingly affected her. All of it coming gradually into perspective in the last few months. The relationships within her family were being tested. Nothing abnormal and no more than what happened in other families. But it pained Amelia, and she'd been at a loss in how to respond.

Some weeks ago, in a moment of clear insight for which she took no credit, she had understood that whatever happened, the relational side of her family should not be taken for granted. She had come across a course on relational principles that appeared to offer answers. Amelia decided to enrol and suggested Peter do as well. Dear Peter, he knew better than to refuse. To his credit he admitted seeing the need and was willing to come along. They had decided to work with the course information together in open communication. So far, this had meant that they would be more willing to accept each other's complexity and different personalities. Not to mention the gender difference, need patterns, and hidden psychological issues that coloured their relationship. In short, they were

trying to become more tolerant of each other. What stood out as a question was their commitment to the whole process of learning about relating. They had talked about that one night in bed.

As Amelia finished her coffee she mused that it would be much nicer to avoid all these struggles and simply live happily. But she was wise enough to know that such thinking was living in denial. That wasn't the answer. Good relational family dynamics weighed heavily with her. They would help her deal with the problems she was facing.

The back door slammed shut. It would be Henry arriving back from school, Amelia thought, and the end of her tranquil moments.

### *Reflections*

- What might be the connections between unhappiness and relating?
- How much might relating style depend on gender and personality type?
- Why is working relating out together the best way?

## Storyline

Peter finds a better way of confronting his daughter in a situation that deserves a reprimand. It's encouraging to see the outcome of that, for his daughter and for himself.

### ***3. It's only a phone-call***

'Why didn't you tell me that Susanna phoned?' Sarah shouted at her brother.

Henry shrugged his shoulders unconcerned. 'Why didn't she phone your mobile?' he suggested.

'Because it's in my locker at school,' Sarah fumed. It was a stupid mistake that seriously annoyed her.

'Mum, tell him that's not good enough, I was waiting for that message.' Sarah turned towards her mother. As little seemed to be forthcoming from those quarters she ran out of the room and slammed the door behind her. Peter wearily got up and followed. He didn't feel this behaviour should be left unanswered.

Walking through the house to Sarah's bedroom he remembered how he had decided to keep his cool with his children. He was getting tired of it though, all that bickering. Sarah needed another talking too. But not like last time. It struck him again how ineffective that had been. Peter stood in the passageway for a moment to check his thoughts. He had been determined after that last lecture on relating to be more non-judgmental and considerate in future, particularly when he was getting annoyed. It wasn't that difficult if you managed to remember in time. This time he wouldn't give Sarah a piece of his mind but figure out a better way of dealing with the situation.

'Go away, Dad – please!' Sarah was sitting on her bed. 'You don't understand.'

'I'm not cross, Sarah.'

Sarah looked at her father searchingly.

'What was so special about that phone call?'

'It's about tomorrow.' Sarah had no intention of enlightening her father any further and Peter didn't press for details.

'Can I say something?' he asked. Sarah shrugged her shoulders.

'Mum and I like you feeling confident and being involved with your friends and they are welcome to phone our home. But that may mean that sometimes the message isn't passed on.'

'But Henry forgets on purpose,' Sarah retorted.

'Yes, I believe he does. That's wrong and I'll sort it,' Peter promised. 'But, as with you yourself, good intentions can be short-lived.'

'It's still wrong.'

'So, it's not wrong to stomp out of the room slamming the door?'

'That's different – it's emotional.'

'Ah – so if I had stormed in here and emotionally gave you a verbal hiding, it would have been okay?'

Sarah didn't respond. Dad was right of course, but it didn't help very much.

'Sorry Sarah, I needed to say that, but it's not how I feel. I can accept your frustration, but I think you would agree the matter isn't all that important, really.' Peter wondered how his lovely daughter would respond to *that* kind of assessment.

She surprised him. 'No, it isn't. It's hormones, Dad.'

It took Peter a moment to digest this unexpected comment. He felt a check of concern and was touched that Sarah was willing to tell him. I could have made a major blunder here, he reflected. Just imagine the downer for Sarah, if he'd barged in throwing his weight around. Amelia would not take that kindly either. 'I'm sorry honey,' he managed to say. 'Does Mum know?'

Sarah nodded and slowly stood up from her bed. Peter gave her a hug. He needed to talk with Amelia. She might have let him know. It should be part of their open communication about family matters.

'You're okay now?' he asked.

'I'm fine - and, sorry Dad.'

'Love you, babe.' Peter left the room.

Amelia looked concerned. 'You didn't fight with her, did you?' She didn't think so, for she hadn't heard any raised voices.

'No, we talked. And you could have told me about those hormones!'

Amelia understood. 'I'm sorry Peter. I should have. Don't be cross.' She put her arms around him and briefly rested her head on his chest. 'I'd better go and see her,' Amelia decided.

Peter thought he'd managed a little victory here, for himself and his family. It didn't feel half bad. Where was Henry?

### *Reflections*

- Stop, stand and think about it! What's the difficulty about this?
- What are Peter's strong points relationally in this story?
- Had Peter made a blunder, what might have been the relational consequences?

## Storyline

What to do when you feel someone isn't *really* listening. That's not easily resolved. And how about finding the other person unreasonable? Why can't you just kick out of a problem? It's all easier said than done. One of the hardest things in relating is accepting the feelings of others, however unreasonable they may seem, without being judgmental. If you can, helpful dialogue may have a chance.

### 4. *Becoming understood*

'So, you feel I don't listen?' Amelia sat back in her chair. They were having coffee in the local mall.

Peter felt alone at that moment. It was not the conversation he was looking for, but it happened. 'Okay, you listen, but you are sometimes not prepared to see my perspective.'

'Perhaps I don't agree with it.'

'That's not really the point. You seem to disagree because you've already made up your mind that my side of the story, how I feel, is immature, or whatever, and simply shouldn't be that way.'

'And you never do that?'

'I try not to.'

They'd had this discussion before. It usually ended in a stalemate, something you got over and on with.

'No, perhaps you don't, but your manner changes, and it's a real nuisance.' Amelia wasn't well pleased. Peter could be impossible at times, particularly when he was under pressure. For someone like herself, who preferred the happy side of life, it was a real pain. Amelia had a stubborn streak and didn't take it all lying down.

'I know,' Peter admitted reflecting on the stupid moods that could get a hold of him. He didn't enjoy being that way one little bit, but it came from deep within and was difficult to deal with. He needed his wife as an anchor in trouble, Amelia, who would prefer to walk a mile from problems. Peter didn't actually blame her for making her point. 'You want more coffee?' he asked.

Amelia nodded. Peter went to order.

'Look,' he said, seated with a fresh cappuccino. 'I'm sorry, let's forget it.'

'At times, I just don't understand you.' Amelia silently considered whether perhaps she didn't want to, because she felt the pressure of it quite unreasonable.

'I know. Fair enough.'

'Perhaps I don't want to understand, because it's unreasonable.'

Peter remained silent. He wasn't going to explain again. He let his gaze drift over the many people scurrying about in the mall and felt sad. It hadn't been a great week.

'We made a kind of pact,' Amelia said, after a while.

Peter looked at her. It concerned those lectures on relating. Amelia was wonderful and he loved her. He should stop expecting her always to detect his deep-seated need patterns and come to the party.

'Look,' Amelia continued, 'I found that place-making equation interesting. The fact that I have to turn towards you with understanding. It seems true enough. We both need to learn from it.' She briefly paused and added, 'I'm sorry, if I am stubborn, but I can find you difficult to fathom.'

'Sure.' Peter could hardly argue with that. He could find it difficult himself. 'If I remember correctly, it starts with turning, with mindset.' He left the sentence hanging in the air.

'You feel I have the wrong mindset? How about yours?' Amelia detected a reproach in Peter's statement and was getting fed-up with it.

'OK, I'm sorry. But of course it starts with mindset. And I wasn't accusing you, just stating facts.'

Yes, sure, Amelia thought. She was becoming too sensitive about it all. Also, Peter was actually right. It did start with turning and she had been too annoyed to care for it. But it took two to tango.

'Well, how about your mindset, Peter?'

Peter looked at his coffee – a cup half empty. 'You know that I love you, Amelia. And that I need you.' He looked at his wife. 'I don't want to make your life difficult, if I can help it.' But sometimes I do, big-time, Peter admitted to himself.

Amelia returned his gaze. Her husband was a complex man - or perhaps just a man, and they're all complex. 'We'd better go,' she said. 'Henry needs picking up from tennis.'

### *Reflections*

- How are 'stupid moods' best dealt with?
- Amelia says that 'perhaps she doesn't want to understand because it is unreasonable.' What about this statement?
- If the relational dynamic of Turning were to function well, how might the story have been different?

## **Storyline**

Being responsible isn't pleasant. It may be character building, but who cares? Unfortunately, the good life isn't possible without taking responsibility. That reality will be tested every day in all kinds of little ways. The challenge is to see the value in doing what is right and know the benefits. Not always for yourself, but for others. Of course, there's no need to be a doormat. The ability to be responsible gives you the power of a healthy self-determination.

### ***5. The human food processor***

'You don't really like cooking, mum, do you?' Henry was hovering about in the kitchen where Amelia was beginning to prepare dinner.

'No, I can't say that I do.'

'So, why can't we go out or get take-away?'

'Because I care, I'm responsible and I have to live with myself.' Not exactly the answer for a 10 year old, Amelia thought. But she didn't feel like cooking and the conversation was beginning to push her buttons.

Henry seemed a little mystified, but unperturbed. 'Can I have some ice-cream?'

'No, you can't,' Amelia said with some force. 'And don't ask why not because you know full well.'

'Why not?'

'Watch it Henry. Don't get me cross. I suggest you go and do your homework.' Her temper was rising.

'I haven't got any.'

'That's a lie, Henry.'

'Not much anyway.' Henry decided not to push his luck too far and left to play a computer game. Mum wasn't in a great mood.

'I cook because I care,' Amelia reflected silently. 'And because I am responsible. And because I have to live with myself.' She had spontaneously blurted it out to Henry and only now saw how true this actually was. When just married, and working full-time, she had often not wanted to cook. Peter very occasionally would prepare a meal or they had bought their dinners. It had been fun. Working fewer hours these days and with a tighter budget restaurant visits were less frequent by far.

'I've become a habitual cook,' Amelia thought and wondered why. But she knew full well why. She was convinced of the importance of good food. This realisation had come gradually as she read up on nutrition and felt concern about the wellbeing of her children. It hurt that the family

seemed so little to appreciate it. Henry undoubtedly would prefer a mother who was less conscientious. Anyway, the family budget didn't allow for fast-food indulgences too often.

'Is there any soft drink?' Henry ambled back in looking for a glass, having not quite made it as far as the computer before his taste buds began to demand attention.

'Have some orange juice.'

Henry opened the fridge door wide and rummaged around the shelves before taking out the orange juice. He slammed the door shut with some force. Amelia managed not to speak a mild rebuke, just in time. She didn't want to be a grumpy mother.

'What's for dinner then,' Henry enquired with his mouth half into the glass of juice.

'Fish.'

Young Henry turned his back ignoring the information and ambled back to the computer without comment.

How will I ever extract personal significance out of cooking, Amelia thought. I'm just a convenient human food processor. But she knew that this wasn't really so. Fortunately she understood the task to be an expression of love and of responsibility, however tedious it might be. In this service she was actually true to herself, even if she didn't like it much. As an act of caring it fitted in well with what she was learning about relational principles. Cooking for a family, however mundane an activity if you didn't feel like it, is relational, she knew. Even if those who devoured her offerings gave little thought to the significance. Tomorrow will be take-away-day, Amelia thought switching on the hotplate. It was the longest day of her part-time job.

### *Reflections*

- What's the secret to caring when you don't feel like it?
- Should Peter let Amelia cook that often?
- How many other words like 'cooking' can you think of?

## **Storyline**

Amelia realises that her reaction to a little accident is completely unhelpful and will only make matters worse. She catches herself in time, considers Henry's feelings, and ends up feeling rather pleased with herself.

### **6. *Skateboarding misadventure***

'But I told you before,' Amelia said angrily. 'You could have got yourself seriously hurt.' Henry began to shed some tears.

'I should put that skateboard away until you can see some sense. Look at your knee!' Henry didn't need to look. It wasn't bad, just a scratch and some swelling, but it hurt.

'Oh, Henry.' Amelia put her arms around him. 'Don't cry, my boy.'

But why shouldn't he? Amelia could see that he was shaken a little. It had been a close shave jumping off and missing that wall. She was reacting naturally but not very wisely. Why rub it in when someone was hurt.

'Sit down for a minute,' Amelia suggested, 'here with me on the bench.' Henry sat down and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. He wasn't seriously injured but felt none too flash all the same. He liked his skateboard though and would get better at it.

'When I was young I used to fall off horses,' Amelia said. 'My mum was terrified that I would break something, which I did once, a finger, but not from falling off.' 'Huh.' Henry snorted, wondering where this was leading.

'Just to say that I know how you feel.' And she did. Growing up on a farm as a young girl riding had been a passion; nothing would have stopped her. Her father would never let her ride his own horse though. 'Leave that one for later,' he ordered. Later had never come.

Henry didn't comment.

'You like your skateboard, don't you?' Not a smart question, for Amelia was well aware that Henry did. The way he looked at her in response clearly questioned why she was stating the obvious. 'Do you have to be that wild with it?'

Henry shrugged his shoulders in defence. Amelia quietly rebuked herself. She wasn't actually helping her hurting son very much, she should really fix up his knee.

'I have to try new things,' Henry said softly, but with conviction.

'Dangerous things?'

Henry nodded.

'Why?' Another unhelpful question. Why indeed? But the answer was simple and revealing. It struck a chord with Amelia – memories from days gone by.

'Because I like it.' Henry looked down at the floor tiles.

'And so you should,' Amelia smiled after a moment, to Henry's significant surprise. 'But don't be stupid with it, okay?'

I'm caring, she reflected. I'm trying to really understand and to be kind with it. It's so hard to let your children follow their star even in a small way.

'My knee hurts, mum.' Henry felt to encourage his mother towards attention of a more physiological kind.

'I'll clean it up in a minute, but I have a suggestion first.' The knee wasn't that urgent.

Henry gave a careful look.

'You should talk with your dad and see how you could improve your skateboarding without trying to kill yourself in the process.'

'It may cost,' replied Henry, ever the opportunist.

Amelia smiled. 'I know,' she said. 'Come on, let's get that knee sorted.'

I've done this rather well, she thought.

### *Reflections*

- When reacting from a perspective of 'what could have happened, but fortunately didn't,' what should I be careful about?
- How do you know you are connecting at a feeling level?
- What reasons can you think of to say that Amelia dealt with the situation competently?

## **Storyline**

When Sarah neglects her duties Peter manages to take responsibility and with care addresses the situation in a way that does not attack his daughter's identity but gives her a chance to be more conscientious in future.

### **7. *Just a little garden job***

Sarah wasn't happy. She had arranged to stay at Sandra's for the night and needed a lift. 'How can I get there if you don't take me?' she accused her father. 'Why won't you?' She stood looking intently at Peter, who sat in a chair opposite.

'I don't feel like it, actually. I've done my bit for the day.' Peter put his head back behind the newspaper he was reading.

'Mum, tell Dad not to be so impossible.' Sarah looked at her mother who seemed to show little interest. 'Will you take me, Mum?'

'Sorry Sarah, taxi driving is your father's business in the evenings.' Amelia seemed unperturbed about her daughter's plight. She had an idea what this was really about.

'Tell me,' Peter asked Sarah, 'what makes you think that I should just get up for a half hour's drive when I have been on the road enough today?'

'You're my father,' Sarah blurted out in annoyance.

'Sure! But why should I drop everything to start ferrying you about?'

'I don't know Dad. You're usually not that difficult about it. So why now?'

'So you feel you can't count on me,' Peter suggested.

'Not right now. No!' Sarah was getting increasingly agitated.

'But why should I be reliable, if you are not?' The question stopped Sarah in her tracks. This was becoming personal in a way she hadn't foreseen.

'What do you mean?'

'A while ago you promised to rake up the leaves in the garden, to help mum and me. It hasn't been done.'

The light dawned with Sarah. 'I'll do it over the weekend,' she promised.

'Then I'll take you to Sandra next week.'

'Come on Dad, it's only a few leaves.' Sarah was getting worried. Her father wasn't usually like that. Perhaps Mum was behind it all.

'If it is only a few leaves I see no reason why you couldn't honour your commitment. It isn't much work. I agree.' Peter seemed determined to stick to his guns. In truth, he didn't at all feel like driving to Sandra's.

Sarah was lost for words and felt like storming out of the room. But that would close the door on a lift for sure. 'Come on Dad,' she pleaded.

'Do you think it is unreasonable of me not to fulfil my driving obligations in this family, if you don't stick to the garden deal? Why should I be any different from you? And don't say because I'm older. That garden job is dead easy. You could have done it.'

'I don't know.'

'So, you want me to be responsible, but yourself, you don't have to be?' Peter was determined to drive the point home for the benefit of his daughter.

Sarah sat down. Words were drying up. She also began to suspect that she would get to Sandra's okay after this was resolved. Unless of course, she was going to be stubborn about it. Her Dad had a point.

'So?' Peter asked.

'Yes, okay Dad, you're right.'

'That's not good enough Sarah.'

'I'm sorry Dad.'

'Listen Sarah, it's quite simple. If you can't be responsible in little things now, how can you be so later on in the bigger ones? And if you can't do that, and life is full of it, you're facing an unhappy future.' Peter imagined this advice would be water on a duck's back at present, but it needed to be said.

Sarah no longer felt like saying much.

'Good. Let's consider it behind us,' Peter decided. 'But next time I won't budge that easily.'

'Thanks Dad.'

'Go get your bag, honey.' Peter was getting up out of his chair. Amelia purposefully didn't look at either of them. But she was pleased.

### *Reflections*

- 'Why should I be trustworthy, if you are not?' Peter asks. Well, why should he, perhaps?
- If the few leaves were mine to clear but I didn't, what would that show?
- What, really, made Peter become a chauffeur after all?

## Storyline

Small mistakes can have dire consequences relationally. Being on the defensive and lashing out makes matters even worse. How deeply irresponsibility can cut is not often realised. Fortunately, Peter doesn't get away with it.

### **8. *The cost of a bargain***

'Where does this come from?' Amelia asked holding up a book about vintage cars.

'From the shop,' Peter responded. 'It was a bargain.'

'Never mind bargains. We agreed you wouldn't buy anymore of those books for a while, as you have plenty already.' It was true. They had agreed on that. 'Also, you were hiding it in your office.'

'It wasn't hiding,' Peter retorted defensively, being well on the back foot. 'And how about that new perfume you bought recently? Isn't that more than your personal allowance can manage?'

If looks could kill, at that moment Amelia would have been a murderer. 'I saved it from my housekeeping.' She began to feel sick in the stomach from Peter's attack.

'So, that's all right then. The housekeeping doesn't belong to you, but to our family. I'll save the cost of the book from my petrol money by not being a family taxi anymore for a while.' This is nasty and not helping, Peter reflected. 'Sorry,' he added, a little too late. 'I shouldn't have said that.'

'I never promised not to save from the household budget. But you did promise to stop buying those books!' Amelia was not easily cowered. Her temper, once up, could flatten mountains.

Peter sighed. It was fair enough. He'd blown it.

'You should practise what you preach,' Amelia commented angrily.

'What do you mean?'

'You're all for openness with each other, and that sort of stuff, as long as it suits. You say you value me, but then you play this trick on me.'

'I *do* value you,' Peter objected.

'But not so much that you could resist buying this book and hiding it?' Amelia, having made her point walked out of the room into the passageway. Peter followed.

'OK, I was wrong,' he admitted. 'It was a stupid thing to do.'

Amelia turned towards him. 'Now, why exactly was it stupid?'

Momentarily Peter was taken aback. It was a penetrating question. Not one to answer quickly. He gave it some thought and Amelia waited with angry expectation.

'I let you down and it undermines your trust in me,' Peter finally confessed. It sounded far too formal but how else could he be exact about it?

'Yes, you did.' Amelia was beginning to lose her anger and for an instant felt strangely vulnerable.

Peter noticed. 'I'm sorry,' he said, and meant it. 'It won't happen again.'

Amelia stood quite still and after a while said, 'It's okay.' Then, she added, 'And I won't save for myself out of the family budget anymore.'

'It was a rotten thing to say,' Peter admitted contritely. He despaired of himself for having let that convenient comment slip out. Amelia didn't deserve that. 'Why don't you just ask for extras or, let's increase your personal allowance?'

'I don't want to talk about that now,' Amelia responded. 'You can make me a coffee, if you like.' The topic was closed.

While filling up the kettle Peter reflected that he had been a fool. If he really wanted that book so badly, he should have discussed it. Amelia wasn't unreasonable and when she seemed to be, she was usually right. He'd done some damage and was determined to make up for it in future. He considered he and Amelia to be close as a couple and desperately wanted to keep it that way.

### *Reflections*

- What is the relational message inherent in Peter's behaviour?
- What might have been the reasons for his initial response?
- What is the damage done?

## **Storyline**

Problems at school. Amelia and Peter take their time reasoning through the situation and find they know the important questions to ask.

### **9. What if?**

'I'd box his ears,' Peter declared.

'No, you won't.' Peter never used violence in anything. 'Just try to be serious with this for a moment,' Amelia warned. They were sitting together on the couch with the TV on mute. Peter kept one eye on the football. 'Perhaps you should switch that off for a while.' It wasn't a great game and Peter complied. Football could be boring.

'I'll read this case study again and, this time, please listen.'

'I've heard it.' Peter suggested.

'Just listen.'

"As parents you are asked to make an appointment with the school principal as your child has fallen out with a teacher and there could be significant repercussions. You are aware that the child has difficulties with that particular teacher. Interpret this situation and apply relational principles."

'Okay,' Amelia suggested. 'Let's take the three positive principles, one at a time.'

That was fine with Peter. Matter of fact, he was beginning to appreciate the wisdom of that information. 'I'd start with my child. Find out what the real problem is. And, as the situation is not new, I probably would have some idea,' he suggested.

'So you won't be reactionary?'

'Definitely not.'

'OK. That sounds like a caring approach.' The next point was the responsibility factor. Amelia said, 'I would consider whether we had given the situation enough attention in the past. Had we really owned the problem as parents or just paid lip service to it.'

'Excellent.' Peter commented. It sounded like his environment at the office.

'So, what would you do about the unity factor?' Amelia asked Peter.

'I would try to be fair to all parties concerned. No chips on shoulders.'

'But say, you don't like that teacher?'

'Possible.' Peter admitted. There had been a few people in his life like that. He decided to return the question. 'How would you take a responsible approach?' he asked.

'Try to listen to the teacher with an open mind, but not taking the information without comment. And if there is anything the teacher says that seems fair enough, we'll deal with it.'

'That then also addresses the unity aspect,' Peter suggested, 'seeing it from the teacher's perspective. But, what if you feel your child is being provoked?'

'Then I'll say so.' And she would, Amelia thought. 'I'd also discuss it with the school principal.'

'Not an easy job that, being principal.' Peter said. 'Too many parties to keep happy. It would drive me 'round the bend. Parents, teachers, volunteers and the government. And not to forget the pupils.'

'Sure,' Amelia agreed. 'But when you accept such a job it comes with those responsibilities, doesn't it.'

'Now you're talking,' Peter replied somewhat tongue in cheek. 'You're getting good at this stuff.'

'Shut up Peter. Be serious.' Amelia had made the comment about responsibilities spontaneously and not really as a result of the sessions on relating. It was quite an obvious observation. But it showed how true to life this relational information actually was.

'Sure.' Peter felt they'd covered the basics. 'I think we're getting the hang of this.'

'Absolutely,' Amelia responded dryly. 'Until the situation really occurs.'

'Then we'll see again,' Peter grinned. 'I'm sure you will do brilliantly, honey.' He actually believed that to be quite true.

'As if!' Amelia commented. 'And don't leave me carrying the can, when troubles come.'

Amelia knew Peter wouldn't do that. Fortunately Sarah was no bother at school. Henry was a different story. She might do well to give it more attention.

'Could you pass me the remote, please?' Peter asked with one eye on the TV.

Will males ever change, Amelia thought? Or was it just the one she happened to have fallen in love with? 'Get it yourself,' she laughed and got up to make a phone-call.

### *Reflections*

- Amelia and Peter discuss a good approach to the problem. What would the wrong approach look like?
- Briefly consider the possible difficulties arising from having a negative relational attitude.
- How is it best decided who should 'carry the candle' in a given situation?

## **Storyline**

Henry feels rather powerless. Is anyone going to listen to his plight? It's not easy being a 10-year old and to depend on others.

### **10. DVD troubles**

'I need to get to the DVD shop,' Henry told his father.

'Not my problem,' Peter responded. He was working in his office on a report that needed tabling at work tomorrow. 'Go and ask your mother.'

'She's got a hairdressing appointment. Got no time. She told me to ask you.' Clearly, Henry was less than impressed and felt a little helpless. He had looked forward to getting this new game today.

'Neither have I got time. Your mum knows I'm busy. Let her sort it.' Peter was becoming irritated and it showed.

'But I booked that game a week ago,' Henry objected in desperation. 'And mum promised then she would take me – and now she isn't.'

Peter got up from behind his desk. This needed sorting. 'I'll go and talk to your mother,' he said.

He found Amelia in the bedroom getting ready for her appointment. 'What's this about a video game,' Peter asked none too friendly.

'Henry booked it, and I forgot about it,' Amelia explained. 'I have no time to pick it up.'

'You promised, so you can't just walk away from that,' was Peter's response.

'Oh, here's mister perfect speaking, who always is so well organised.' Amelia got her hackles up in response to Peter's brusque attitude.

'Look,' Peter commented, 'I've got no time either.'

Amelia walked to the kitchen to get her car keys. 'Fair enough, then Henry will have to learn to wait.' She made for the back door.

Henry, who had followed the interaction between his parents over a distance, was near to tears. 'That's not fair,' he objected loudly. 'If we don't pick up that game today it'll be gone.'

Peter stood exasperated in the middle of the kitchen. His son, considering it a lost cause, was leaving for his bedroom and a bed to cry on. His wife was seriously annoyed and probably would still be when she came back home. His concentration this evening was now shattered and the report would be 10 times more difficult to write. What a mess! He needed a coffee, and put the kettle on.

Henry, appearing carefully from behind the kitchen door, had decided to broach the topic one final time. 'Dad?' he said not so loudly.

'Come here son. I'm sorry. It's not your fault.' Peter felt for his little fellow. He didn't look at Henry, but concentrated on pouring hot water. 'We'll get that game together.'

'Mum shouldn't have forgotten,' Henry suggested helpfully.

Peter looked at him. 'She shouldn't have son, but she's allowed to be forgetful at times. None of us are that perfect.'

Henry, wisely shut up and accepted a biscuit from Peter, who took one from the tin himself.

Peter reflected ruefully how easily a small matter could run out of hand creating considerable difficulties. He had reacted gruffly simply because he was concentrating on that report. Henry had had his eyes on that game for a while now. Peter knew that.

'Come on, champ.' He lifted young Henry up against his chest in a bear hug heading for the car. 'I might play that game myself.'

### *Reflections*

- Which of the six relational principles can you find in this story?
- Who dealt better with the situation, Peter or Amelia, and why?
- Amelia forgot but she was welcome to, Peter explained to Henry. What does that show?

## Storyline

There is an opportunity for a deep and meaningful talk. Peter and Amelia may well have let this one slip by, and that would have been truly unfortunate.

### ***11. A matter of trust***

Peter sat slumped in his favourite chair and looked exhausted. Amelia was concerned.

'You're working too hard,' she felt to comment. 'Haven't you achieved enough this year?'

'I've got a target in mind that can be reached,' he grumbled in response.

'Yes, and I bet it's more than is expected,' Amelia observed ruefully. 'Success is just so important to you, isn't it?'

'Don't knock it babe.' Peter was on the defensive now. He felt spent, but a night's sleep should fix it.

'No, I appreciate how hard you work, but for what? Is it going to pay you so much more?' Amelia knew her husband only too well. She knew that he was an achiever, that's what made him tick. But she also knew the downside of it and was worried.

'It'll bring a bonus,' Peter mumbled.

'Yes, but at what cost?' Amelia was determined to stay reasonable and not to allow tension in her voice. 'I mean, it doesn't do you much good, Peter.' Nor our family either, she thought.

Peter didn't respond. He had been wondering lately whether his life was getting out of balance too much. It surely felt that way. Why did he always seek to be one of the best operators in the company?

Amelia seemed to read his mind. 'What is it that tells you to push yourself that hard?' she asked. She knew that Peter wasn't as confident as he always projected.

'You really want to know?' He regretted the question immediately. And then he didn't. Perhaps it was time to talk.

'Yes Peter, I would - if you don't mind telling.'

Peter hesitated. He was facing a significant moment. A turning point, somehow. It was time to trust his wife. 'Can I trust you?' he asked. But of course he could.

Amelia remained silent for a while looking at Peter. 'Yes,' she said and meant it. This would not be information that was to be bounced back at him later for whatever reason.

Her simple 'Yes' dismantled the barrier Peter might have felt. 'I like being positive and efficient,' he explained, 'and I fear failure. Not enormously, but I do.'

The confession hung in the air. Amelia let it settle and wasn't that surprised. She'd realised it over the years anyway. But it would be good to talk about it openly. After some thought she said, 'And you are afraid that actually you will fail?'

'No, not really. At least, not yet. But I may overreach one day. Perhaps that day is coming closer?' Peter straightened up a little in his chair.

Amelia felt for her husband. It was a tough world out there in commerce. Still, she thought he should know better and said, 'You've got it all wrong, Peter. You've long proven what you are capable of. It's time to get that monkey off your back.'

'What monkey?'

'The one that climbed onto you years ago. As a handsome and capable young guy you discovered that people praised you when you were achieving. You liked success and it gave you identity. It became your way of coping effectively with life. Also, you like people and altogether it is a potent mix for excellent performances. But it's a trap, unless you draw the line and get on top of this need for extended recognition.' Amelia spoke with feeling. She knew that she was right and was wondering about her own extended need to feel happy and untroubled. Balance in life didn't come easily, emotionally or otherwise.

'You're very right,' Peter admitted after some time, quietly surprised about this insight of his wife. 'We should talk about it more, but I'm too tired for that right now.'

'Why don't we go away for a weekend?' Amelia suggested. She had wanted to do that soon anyway – to touch base together. 'Ask your mum to come over and stay with Sarah and Henry.'

'Weekend after next,' Peter said without hesitation. In the meantime he would begin to reflect more on his lifestyle overall, what drove him, and how smart that really was.

### *Reflections*

- How might correctly applied relational principles help against overworking?
- Leaving my vulnerabilities unmentioned can be relationally dangerous. Why might this be so?
- Why might many people never open up about it, not even to themselves?

## **Storyline**

A weekend away can do wonders for a relationship – but not without giving quality communication some due attention. Anything taken for granted will soon lose its value and significance. The outcome: another loss in life and a dulling of its enjoyment.

### ***12. It's a deal***

Amelia and Peter sat on the veranda of a country cottage, which they had rented for a weekend. The day was nearing dusk with orange colours lacing the blue sky in places where the sun hit streaks of cloud. It had been a good day, relaxing and profitable. They had not felt that close to each other for a long time. Both had taken care in being sensitive listeners without immediate answers or opinions. If not a watershed, it was at least an important step forward relationally. For too long matters in family life had been left to roll on, one after the other, without sufficient evaluation. There was always the next issue or activity that clambered for attention. Touching base significantly no longer seemed to take place much. Intuitively Peter and Amelia had felt that this cycle needed breaking. It had been the reason for Amelia enrolling them in those sessions on relational dynamics, which had been a good idea.

Peter was encouraged that his wife had not made light of his identity struggle related to success, but took it seriously – not as a problem but simply as a matter that needed attention. There was no reason why he couldn't move on from there into a more personally liberating perspective. Having Amelia positively in support would be half the battle won. Amelia in turn had shared that many of her smiles actually concealed a considerable sadness. The world was a mess and many people suffered. It pained her and her response usually was to think of something happy instead. That Peter had not thought this silly but encouraged her in coming out from behind that happy façade, had been nothing less than a blessing. He seemed glad to talk about it. Occasionally in the past he had made comments about how her light heartedness did not always line up with how she really felt. However, it had never been discussed like today. Both felt that they were giving each other emotional space and in doing so were strengthening the bond of living together. 'A bit of place-making,' Amelia reflected, giving each other a real place of belonging.

'It's not just us,' Peter commented, 'it's also the children.' The sun was noticeably dropping down towards the horizon and soon would disappear. The speed of this at its final moments always surprised Peter.

'Yes,' Amelia agreed, 'but that too starts with each of us and both of us together.'

Peter didn't respond.

'I think we should simply tell each other when we are expressing relational demoralisers. No blame.' To Amelia that seemed the most obvious and best approach to take.

'Well, we can try,' Peter said. 'As long as we know what we're about.'

Amelia returned the small challenge she perceived in this declaration. 'You can remember a lot of data for your job Peter, so memorising a few basics about relating shouldn't be overly difficult'

'If I don't, I'm sure you'll keep me honest,' Peter grinned. He loved his wife, and his children, and had already decided to make sure that those basics became firmly embedded in his mind.

'Is this a deal, or just for now a good idea?' Amelia asked. So many resolutions came to nothing unless they were worked on.

'It's a deal, as long as the whole dynamic remains positive,' Peter suggested.

Amelia extended her hand. 'Shake hands.'

'Sure.' Peter stood up, shook hands and pulled Amelia up unto her feet. 'Time for the restaurant,' he said.

### *Reflections*

- How can someone become a 'sensitive listener without immediate answers or opinions?'
- Describe the cycle Amelia and Peter needed to break.
- How would you set out to become QRF relational?

## **Storyline**

An everyday situation in the office is discussed by Peter and a friend. He uses relational questions and makes some insightful decisions.

### ***13. A business situation***

'So you have a real problem at hand instead of a hypothetical?' James concluded.

'Since yesterday, yes,' Peter confirmed. They were at Peter's place to discuss how well the relational principles could be applied to business activity. James ran his own small company and, like Peter, had attended the sessions. Amelia, Sarah and Henry were at the cinema and for once the house was quiet.

'Okay, let's hear,' James said.

Peter drank the last of his coffee and explained. 'One of my admin staff, Mrs Jensen, has lodged a complaint with me against a salesman who responded inappropriately, when she commented on a questionable item on his expense account. If what she says is true, there should be repercussions for both the expense and his behaviour towards another staff member. He's left the city on one of his regular country runs and won't be back for a few days.' Peter knew that most female employees in his department were eagerly awaiting further developments in the situation.

'Is that a complete description of what's involved?' James asked. He consulted the notes on relating.

'No. The salesman used to be one of my best, but lately his performance has suffered because of troubles at the home front, something to do with his wife getting fed up with him being away too much. There may be more to it. But he knows his clients better than anyone and is very good at his job,' Peter explained.

'Okay. What's your attitude Peter, with regard to the whole thing?' James had decided to take the lead with questions and while doing so would consider his own responses, though not verbalise them.

'Initially I was annoyed, mainly because it's a problem I can do without.' Peter thought he had enough on his plate. But, of course, that was an immature response. 'Upon further reflection, I think there's a place for concern in various ways.'

'And, you feel you can be objective?'

'Well, let's say, I'm willing to try.'

'Does Mrs Jensen bother you?' James was getting into it, this problem so typical of a business environment. He had faced some challenging situations with personnel himself over the years.

Peter reflected that the lady wasn't his type. She was a stickler for rules, but then that's what her job required. 'No, no bother,' he said.

'So, who got hurt, and who might become so?' It was a key question in the notes.

'I don't think Mrs Jensen is greatly hurt,' Peter suggested, 'but I'll follow that through. She seemed mostly to be fed-up with rudeness and innuendo. The salesman is a little known for this. The one hurting most is probably him, because of his family problems.'

'Did Mrs Jensen give reason for a bad response in any way?'

'In fact,' Peter explained, 'it isn't actually her role to raise the issue of dubious expenses with sales staff. She should simply report those for me to ask the questions, as I see fit.'

'Have you pointed that out to her?'

'Not yet, it wasn't the right time, but I will.'

'So, how do you see your responsibility in the situation?' James had already made up his own mind and wondered what Peter thought.

'I have a responsibility to the salesman in that his mistake probably is the result of pressures at home that are related to the nature of his job - the frequent country travelling. Mrs Jensen has been badly treated and absolutely should get an apology from the salesman. I will explain to her that our company may be partly to blame. That doesn't excuse the salesman's behaviour, of course. I'll ask my secretary to have a chat with her as well to give support. She's good at that.'

'But you will also have to confirm with Mrs Jensen that she'll leave dealing with dubious expense items to you.'

'Sure,' Peter said. He was already thinking about how to reorganise the rounds of his sales team. It might make a dent in his sales projections for a while, but perhaps not. 'I will discuss possible changes in his rounds with the salesman,' Peter told James.

'But taking advantage of an expense account should not be overlooked,' came the response.

'Not likely,' Peter stated with some feeling, 'nor his behaviour. It's time I address that. And I'll insist that he apologises properly to Mrs Jensen for his outburst.'

James decided to raise the final point of the relational principles they were discussing 'So, how is the integrity of your department, of your company, supported in taking this approach?'

'Regularly we tell our staff that we care about them, so there is no harm in showing a willingness to work through difficult situations rather than ignore them.'

'Spot on,' James agreed. That relational checklist wasn't bad.

Peter was glad to have decided on an approach. Actually, considering how well the salesman had served the company over the years, it was reasonable that he should be given an opportunity to alter his rounds, if that would assist his family life. He should also work on his behaviour. Male innuendo in the workplace was anathema. Perhaps professional help would be necessary.

Fortunately, Mrs Jensen seemed the resilient type, but you could never know for certain. That, too, needed a considerate approach.

'Hi Dad!' Henry stormed in full of energy regardless of the late hour. Sarah and Amelia followed. They were all smiles.

Home, sweet home, at *Wilson Road!*

### *Reflections*

- Why might it be that businesses often do not have a system by which to address their relational environment?
- What makes the discussion between Peter and James profitable?
- List the positive relational outcomes they achieve.