

Transcription:

Speaker	Dialogue
Z	<i>It's about the next step, it's about creating that progression within our relationship. "How do we interact when we are in a routine trying to live our lives in parallel?" It's a little scary. I don't know. It's been so nice up into this point. That might ruin some stuff, but I think it's an important step.</i>
A	<i>It's kept us on a honeymoon phase for two years which is great. Maybe part of me worries that it'll end. I know it will end someday, maybe not.</i>
M	<i>People have often asked me about saving marriages and my response is always... that's never been a business that I thought I was in. We don't have it that couple staying together is the end point, like the objective in every case. For us, it's about people getting off the fence, getting real about their relationship. So either you're in or you're out and choose, but don't spend 20 years ambivalent about your relationship. To me, that's the tragedy.</i>
AH	<p>MY NAME IS ANDY HORNING, AND THIS IS ELEPHANT TALK. IT'S ABOUT ALL THINGS RELATIONSHIP - THE SOULFUL, THE SILLY AND THE SEXY.</p> <p>Today's episode spans the arc from the early stages of relationship with Alex and Zack to the later stages of partnership and tools marriage counselors, Michael and Robin use to help couples find their way back to one another after a partnership goes cold.</p> <p>Zack and Alex have been dating two years. Just prior to this conversation, they decided to move in together to see if their relationship has long term potential. They discuss their fears around this next step in their coupledness.</p>
Z	The first time we met, I was staying with a friend in Boulder.
A	He said, "I'm having some people over at my house," and I go there and about an hour later you show up.
A	<p>You played guitar that night too and I think we sing a song or two together.</p> <p>And then I remember keeping you a little bit at a distance and you're writing on my Instagram inviting me to go swimming in the creek after work.</p> <p>After a couple of weeks, I thought, "Okay, I'll give you a chance." I remember going on that hike with you and we saw a big coyote and that was pretty cool and just had a nice time and then I felt more open and receptive to you and I think that summer things started moving really quickly and we just had a lot of fun.</p> <p>And it wasn't at least for a couple of weeks until I learned that you didn't actually even live in Boulder. And I thought, "What? How can I do this? How can I make this work?"</p>

Z	<p>Maybe I came forward with the fact that I didn't actually live in Boulder a little earlier than that and maybe selective hearing allowed you not to hear what you didn't want to hear.</p> <p>I remember being particularly attracted to your drive to kind of go out and explore these beautiful places to the point where you had actually been just going on big long hikes by yourself.</p> <p>I've done some mountaineering by myself just not a whole lot, but every time I do it's such a spiritual encounter and then kind of learning about you and learning that this was something that you frequently actually made time for was not just going in the mountains but specifically making sure that you're by yourself so you could have those experiences.</p> <p>That to me kind of changed my perception on kind of who it was I was dealing with and it was really very impressive.</p>
A	<p>I think having that same appreciation for nature, for the wilderness, you just connect with someone in a different way. It's almost something you can't really describe and that's a depth that I felt with you.</p>
Z	<p>With you, I saw an opportunity to kind of share a passion for something but not necessarily have to be in a situation where it felt competitive.</p>
Z	<p>What really stands out to me is musically when we connected for the first time. It was this really embarrassing thing for you Alex because you really kind of opened up on a way that you don't normally.</p> <p>It was really adorable for me to see your level of hesitance and at the same time what you are showing me was so impressive. You were such a talented musician but at the same time, you had such a hesitance in terms of actually sharing your art with someone. There was a modesty to it that was extremely attractive to me.</p>
A	<p>I feel like one thing we can really share together beyond going out and doing hikes together or skiing is connecting through music and playing together.</p> <p>When we played that open mic in Washington, just that tiny little bar which was so much fun, it wasn't great, but it was something I could see happening again in the future that we could progress and learn more about each other and connect even deeper through music and creating music together and sharing that with other people.</p> <p>I think we naturally complement each other and I think our openness can really lend itself toward making some awesome music.</p>
Z	<p>Music is the place where we connect at more of an even playing field whereas as soon as we start getting into mountaineering and especially skiing, it really kind of turns into this lopsided position where it's kind of my realm.</p> <p>So there's a balance because I love that we shared the interest in the sports but at the same, there's also a hesitance for me to completely involve you in what I do in the mountains entirely whereas with music, I don't have that.</p> <p>There's nothing that I won't explore with you musically because it's more of a place that's ours together as opposed to mine. My world and exposing you to my world especially when there's an inherent level of danger involved in that.</p>

Interviewees: **Alex [A]** **Zack [Z]**; **Michael [MI]** and **Robin [RO]**

Interviewer: Andy Horning [AH]

Z	<p>So when we actually decided to go to an open mic night, that was a big step, especially for me because I play guitar kind of acoustically, very quietly with myself.</p> <p>And Alex, you are fantastic singer. And you don't hold back when you sing. You're loud and you project because you're a trained artist. And I think for me, going to open mic night was a lot more intimidating than it was for you, right?</p>
A	<p>I got really excited.</p> <p>I was thinking, "Oh, we have this opportunity to share something together with other people that we both truly love. I remember feeling some butterflies walking over there, but it felt like such an accepting crowd.</p> <p>I just felt so at ease when you started playing and I could just look over at you because we're sort of across the room and make eye contact with you and all of a sudden it felt like the rest of the room just disappeared and I was very connected with you in that moment and my nerves just went away.</p> <p>It was amazing. And we didn't sound the best, we could have sounded, but I felt that was almost the best part because it was very genuine.</p>
Z	<p>I guess I had a very different experience with it because for me it was incredibly intimidating. And the audience as opposed to being like very nonjudgmental, this was actually an audience full of people that I'd known for years that had no idea that I even attempted to play guitar.</p> <p>And now I was kind of opening myself up to them and their experience of who I was. At the same time, introducing a new person to the community and I just felt this big pressure to kind of at least pull off a certain level of performance.</p> <p>Everything went kind of silent and my fingers didn't really do what they're supposed to, but I do feel like that above a lot of other things is something I look back and can think about as this landmark in our relationship of doing something together.</p>
A	<p>I feel like you're such a perfectionist in other areas of your life. You have been with skiing. You are with your artistry with woodworking and carpentry.</p> <p>Music allows us, to be on this level playing field where we can grow into that together, and I think you not being perfect that night was awesome. For me, it made me feel more like a normal human being because I think sometimes being around you it's hard.</p> <p>And maybe if there's something that I'm better than you at or something that we're both the same, it just feels nice.</p>
Z	<p>I don't feel like I'm particularly talented musician.</p>
A	<p>Thirty minutes a day. That's our goal to practice music together. Every day for half an hour.</p>
A	<p>Our start day for music every day is when we're living together, which maybe is more of a fantasy than reality because I know you're still going to be traveling.</p>
Z	<p>I'm much more committed to routine than I've ever been in my life before. I'm feeling a real desire for some kind of semblance of just... what I'm talking</p>

	<p>about is positive, healthy, productive habits that hopefully allow us to kind of continue to explore how we can share time together.</p>
AH VO	<p>Zack is a professional skier and tiny house builder. He is on the road more than he's home. Early on in their dating, Alex was laid off from her job and took the opportunity to start her own business...a long-time dream. This gave her the flexibility to go on the road with Zack.</p>
Z	<p>That, definitely without question, is the one move that really allowed our relationship to continue to grow. It was a 100% about my schedule and how we are going to balance our relationship with someone ... like myself who's traveling nearly constantly.</p> <p>That was the first real sacrifice that happened within our relationship and I know you say, "Oh, this is something that I wanted to do anyways," but I definitely mark it down as a sacrifice on your part.</p>
A	<p>I'm glad you recognize that because it has been in many ways a sacrifice, especially after I really established my friend group here, I call them "My Lady Tribe."</p> <p>I'm used to seeing a friend for dinner or maybe going to a show or happy hour, coming home, cooking dinner for myself, you know going on hikes, going to yoga, just really taking care of myself and having a healthy balance.</p> <p>When I would travel to go see you, I felt suddenly very imbalanced and a little bit isolated working from hotel lobbies or hotel rooms. Then we would hang out at night when you would come back from the job site and it just turned into like a party fest half the time with the rest of the crew.</p> <p>And it felt like the pendulum was from one side here in Boulder where I felt balanced swinging all the way over to an extreme imbalance.</p> <p>It was a lot of it trying to find that middle ground and trying to... maybe more so within myself create that space and those boundaries for myself to feel balanced than anything, but it's been a challenge.</p>
Z	<p>When you're traveling, it's kind of like everything is out the window and I definitely feel that has been a piece where having you rearrange your life so you can kind of spend time with me out on the road has been more of a sacrifice because it's not just about, "Oh, let's go have fun traveling,"</p> <p>It's really you getting taken out of not just your comfort zone but the routine that you've established to become as healthy and happy as you are. And that health and happiness is something that's extremely attractive about you and I don't want you to lose that.</p> <p>Now if we're going to move into together, you're going to be moving to a city that you're really not very familiar with and you're going to be really kind of leaving a big friend network behind.</p> <p>The most worrisome thing for me is finding a way to strike a balance so it doesn't just feel to you like you're the one constantly giving.</p>
A	<p>I was going to have to move no matter what. My lease was coming up. So whether I found a new living situation in Boulder or elsewhere, I wanted to have that experience with you.</p>

Interviewees: **Alex [A] Zack [Z]; Michael [MI] and Robin [RO]**

Interviewer: Andy Horning [AH]

	<p>It felt really important to me after coming up on two years of being together that we make that step and the reality is that you're still going to travel, you're still going to be doing your thing.</p> <p>But I am thinking in my head, "Well, maybe I'm putting too much pressure on this," because to me it's felt like such an important step and for you, I think you've been thinking about it a lot differently.</p>
Z	<p>I do see it as an important step. For me I'm kind of wondering, "All right, we're going to move in together, but my life still is going to be very random." So it's really hard for me to predict, "Okay, how much time am I actually going to be there with you?"</p> <p>I'm looking for that experience that you have when you're at your house and you're taking care of yourself and you're maintaining all the things you need to professionally, but at the same time you're carving time for yourself.</p> <p>I know that by teaming up with you and actually forming a house together that it puts me in a great position to have that kind of philosophy and that lifestyle rub off on me.</p> <p>I'm really inspired by the way that you live yourself and the focus you have on health. I'm looking to kind of gain from this process of moving in together on how to balance the personal health as well the professional life.</p>
A	<p>It's really a beautiful thing and I want to share that with you.</p>
Z	<p>I call it your goddess routine. It's Alex's goddess routine.</p>
Z	<p>I'm just inspired by that and I guess I want some goddess routine for myself.</p>
A	<p>Just that idea of home for me is a place and a space where I can do those things. It's our space together. There's that energy there.</p>
Z	<p>It's about creating that progression within our relationship. "How do we interact when we are in a routine trying to live our lives in parallel?" It's a little scary. I don't know. It's been so nice up into this point. That might ruin some stuff, but I think it's an important step.</p>
A	<p>It's kept us on a honeymoon phase for two years, which is great. Maybe part of me worries that it'll end. I know it will end someday, maybe not.</p>
A	<p>Last night I expressed some slight fears of feeling that when we are together, it's this immersion where we're always together. It feels like vacation mode.</p> <p>We don't always get to be together and I find myself just wanting to spend all my time with you. I need to step back from that and say no. I need to continue to have my autonomy.</p>
Z	<p>If you need your own space any moment, you don't have to worry about me feeling like I'm getting deserted or something like that because there's always stuff that I'm happy to work on, on my own.</p> <p>What does scare me is how we balance if you are going to move into a space where, I've lived for a long time, I have a lot of friends in that area, my family is in that area, even if we're going to move into a home that's together, it's still</p>

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	<p>you kind of moving into my zone. My biggest fear is how that's going to feel to you.</p> <p>And the other fear I kind of have is that we haven't really gone through as a couple when things really get difficult and how we respond to that whether we come together to get through it or whether or not we kind of separate emotionally.</p> <p>Is going to be an interesting test and there's no way that things can be maintained being as easy and problem free as we've experienced in the last two years.</p>
A	<p>Most couple's experience that day to day first then they have opportunities to travel together where we're doing it flipped. It will be exciting learning these little nuances about one another.</p> <p>We talk really well together. We have that trust even if it's something difficult I can come to you and you're going to listen to me, truly listen to me, and we'll talk about it. And I feel like you have that trust in me where you can tell me anything and I'm not going to judge you.</p>
MUSIC BREAK	
A	<p>One thing my family has sort of judged me on my whole dating life has been that I give up too much for whoever it is that I'm dating. And I lose a lot of my independence.</p> <p>I certainly wasn't always choosing the healthiest relationships. I definitely was that way. And it took really getting my heart broken by someone, to really feel like standing on your own two feet emotionally more than anything is the most important thing you can do to having a successful relationship...</p>
A	<p>The goddess routine really came from a lot of pain and trying to heal myself from that trauma.</p>
A	<p>I had given up so much to be with other people that were actually undeserving of that sacrifice. And I did go through a huge internal shift and I found happiness from within myself.</p> <p>I did a lot of just personal transformation over this year. When I met you I was just coming out of this chrysalis of kind of finishing that process and feeling like I could open up to the world again.</p>
Z	<p>I had spent really my entire adult life in one relationship. I never had that kind of period of my life where I felt like, "Okay, I'm independent." I went out of my way to build in a certain amount of distance because I was concerned about getting caught up in the next big relationship. So I think both of us were kind of at that place.</p> <p>It really was I think timing for me of meeting you recognizing, "Wow! This is someone that I really think is special in terms of all these different qualities that I really find compatible with my own life."</p> <p>And then also seeing you as this person that had so much personal discipline. I really saw it as something that if I could harness some of that in my own life, it would really benefit me.</p>

	Now I already kind of have this hesitation even though I think we can make a beautiful life together at the same time, I'm almost feeling like it might not be the best idea to have you move into my world completely like that.
A	But it feels different to me because I went through this process of understanding, "No, I do need to have autonomy. I need to have this independence. I need to have my own life in order for anything else to truly be healthy." That's where the difference is this time around.
Z	Are you already concerned about it working out?
A	I think there is natural, not necessarily hesitations but fears of, "Can I keep my promises I've made to myself? I have a lot of work to do to make this work I think not only for myself, but for both of us of having that healthy independence where we're both strong independently. It's not just me getting sucked into your world.
Z	I can't help but having a bit of fear and anxiety that you're going to be overwhelmed with kind of how much you feel like has been swept out from underneath you.
Z	Before we actually go through with getting married, I feel like it's a really wise idea to at least try to live together as a real unit and try to make our lives parallel. We've been living in this like kind of beautiful La La Land existence, I almost feel like we need to go through something together. I want something that's going to be hard to come into our lives so that we can just practice working through it.
A	We haven't had a legit fight. Both of us are pretty peaceful people. So we're not going to yell at each other. We both have a tendency to be passive and not really express what we're feeling.
A	I can say there have been times where I've been upset and I haven't told you about it because it was something I wanted to have face to face. And then a week or two had passed where I would actually see you and I had gotten over it. When we do live together maybe we will fight because, you know, if something is happening in the moment, you're going to be there.
A	You know you saying you think we should go through struggle before we think about getting married. I think to what degree is the struggle?
Z	So it's almost like we need to manufacture, so that when we do come to one of these larger life challenges we already have some experience in that process.
A	You're way more fixated on this creating issues thing than I am. I don't want to create an issue. I want it to flow and if we get to a hard place, I've gotten through so many hard places in my life. I've been very adaptable and resilient and I feel like you're adaptable and resilient.

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	<p>Having those little moments where we did have some scares. We handled them really gracefully and in my most upset state you were so comforting and so positive and told me no matter what, this doesn't change my love for you.</p> <p>That was really just reassuring. I felt so much closer to you for having gone through that experience that almost felt like life changing and just very dramatic.</p>
Z	<p>Every couple should go through a number of moments that require them to practice on how to come together and deal with hardship before you actually go through with marriage.</p> <p>It's like this checklist that I feel like people should go through before they get married because like I said I'm someone that feels like marriage is very much about having family.</p> <p>And once you involve children, at least in my mind, it means that you're involved whether you like it or not for the long haul.</p> <p>I don't want to get into a relationship where I'm going to have children with someone and then break up with them. It's not part of how I see the world. It's not even like an option necessarily.</p>
A	<p>So no matter how miserable you would be, like divorce just wouldn't be an option?</p>
Z	<p>I want to make sure that I'm not just theoretically compatible with somebody, but that we've actually gone through some things to prove it to ourselves and we've figured out a strategy of getting through stuff.</p>
MUSIC BREAK	
A	<p>A wheelhouse for neither one of us are very comfortable is probably finances. And I think that if honestly opened up our finances together and tried to work through some of that, I think I'd be a pretty big slap in the face of, "Wow! We both suck at this."</p> <p>That could potentially cause some difficulty and challenge because I think both of our incomes tend to fluctuate and taxes for both of us are a little bit more complicated and I see that being some tension potentially between us.</p>
Z	<p>I guarantee that you should not count on me completely to be a financial provider because I just know myself very well and I know take I am a risk taker and I think I have a flaw, a family flaw of never settling on one project. That's a place that I'm concern for sure.</p>
Z	<p>I think for you to be exposed to the person that typically is kind of broke and see if that is somebody that you still could be compatible with would be interesting for me. How do you feel about it?</p>
A	<p>I've never said I want you to take care of me and I don't.</p>
Z	<p>You wouldn't expect it, but that is certainly what I would do. Both of us kind of acknowledged there's a little bit of imbalance on the focus of our lives. Your</p>

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	<p>business is extremely important and I don't want to lose sight of that.</p> <p>But in terms of like at least right now what's kind of our best chance as a couple to create something in the near future that it's going to give us financial stability for the long term, we kind of end up prioritizing my career at this moment.</p>
Z	<p>Last night you kind of brought up this concept of, you know, what are your non-negotiables? Right now, the non-negotiable to me is this notion of hardship and how we go about dealing with that hardship.</p> <p>When we come across something that's challenging, are we going to shut down and internalize it and go through the process of grief and the process of just working through things on our own or is this something that we're going to share between us?</p> <p>It won't work for me if it's something that we try to do internally, independently. It's got to be something that we share.</p> <p>You also have to understand that I'm going to be looking for the silver linings. I'm going to be looking for a way to fix things.</p> <p>That's a request that I would have of you is just to understand that it's so important to me that we share grief and we share hardship and at the same time for you to recognize that this person that you're getting involved with is going to be an eternal optimist.</p>
A	<p>You've shown that many times already, your grand optimism and your silver linings and sometimes it's frustrating.</p> <p>My non-negotiable is, I think you've kind of put me on a bit of a pedestal which is not really a terrible thing. But it's also not reality and I'm not saying you see me as a perfect person, but I want you to feel like you can call me out on things.</p> <p>Tell me if you think I'm making a bad choice or if you think I spend too much money. Feel comfortable telling me that you're not okay with something because otherwise I just feel you're being complacent.</p>
Z	<p>I never had sisters. I grew up, girls were kind of off limit to criticism basically. I mean it was like boys are fair game, girls are just... they're all perfect. When you're insulated from that, I think you end up treating women differently for good or for bad, but I'll work on that. I'll work on being a little bit more critical of the things you do.</p>
A	<p>I'm not asking you to criticize me, but I think I am asking you to be open to me making wrong choices sometimes and whether it's something that would affect us together or not that you feel like I can be a close friend to you and we can have maybe awkward conversations and not make them awkward.</p> <p>You can come to me really with anything. And so I hope you do that because I feel like sometimes, you know, you are a little passive and you're not really directive.</p>
Z	<p>I'm highly passive.</p>
A	<p>You're not allowed to be passive-aggressive with me.</p>

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Z	I'm not really passive-aggressive. I'm kind of passive-passive to the point where then after awhile I just give up. So it's a little different because I never get to the aggressive point, but I do something that's probably even worse which is I just distance and distance and then give up.
A	That's definitely not healthy. So let's work on that.
Z	If you ever feel like there's a distance that starts to take place, a hug really changes that.
AH	As we approach certain milestones in a relationship, there is a natural fear of the unknown. What will happen when we move in together? What will it be like to be married? To have kids? These are universal fears. Alex and Zack share theirs so openly. Since we taped that conversation, Alex and Zack are now engaged and happily settling into their life together in one house.
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Speaker	Dialogue
AH	Michael and Robin were featured as a couple in episode 8. You may recall their story of losing a child and ending their first marriage to each other and beginning the second...also to each other. In their professional lives, Michael and Robin counsel couples. They help them get off the fence about their relationship...and decide whether they are in or out. They give couples tools that, if practiced, can keep a relationship healthy and resilient.
AH	Do you notice triangulation in relationships? Does it always feel like there's some other thing that's interfering with the connection of a couple whether it's a job or an addiction? Is that a dynamic you see in the world in relationships?
RO	I think when communication breaks down, when our connection, when trust breaks down with our partners and we don't know how to repair that or reconnect that, it's got to go somewhere, that energy, the feelings, the needs, all of that stuff has got to leak out somewhere and we just turn to unconsciously usually other places. So yeah, substances, work, TV, kids, pets. You know workaholism is a big one right now. But that's just I think a symptom of the fact that the connection and the channel of communication with our beloved is broken down. So that's why just giving people effective tools to open that up and be able to confide and listen and really tolerate the differences and conflict and work through them.

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AH	That's great. Michael, what's your take on that triangle talk and the communication?
MI	<p>I think at this point, mostly I'm aware that we each have our own spiritual practices that we do and I think that's really important and I would name that as sort of a third element. Robin's chaplain, a local unity church, and I do a form of therapeutic dance.</p> <p>And I think it's really healthy for us to have something that's emotionally and spiritually deeply engaging that we do independently. And then, you know, Sunday afternoons, we tend to come back together and share our stories of what we got from the morning.</p>
AH	Most people talk about sharing and having a spiritual practice. You're going beyond that and saying, "What about if that spiritual practice were different and honored for being different?"
MI	That'd mean I'd be right for everyone. But for us, we have different interests in that regard and I think it is important in every couple to have healthy outside relationships that are compelling and that are engaging.
AH	How would you describe what you do, who you are professionally, and what you do?
MI	Before we came here, we walked up the Mount Sanitas and back and that's one of our practices to do these morning walks and one of the things we do on that is we use one of the tools that is part of...
MI	What we teach, what we share with other couples. And so I think at the core of what we do is practical tools that we use ourselves and that we continue to refine and hone our relationship using the material that we're sharing with other people.
AH	You're like your own little lab.
RO	We [inaudible 00:05:45] because we needed it. I introduce us as couple's educators and I also have a private practice as a couple's counselor. But my passion is really about giving couples the tools and the skills that can foster that connection, that sense of intimacy that there are skills and tools that can be learned and intimacy can be deeply cultivated or restored even when people feel that they've lost all hope. So we teach seminars for couples together as a couple. So that's why we need the work as much as anybody. Even after 22 years of teaching, we always have material to work on.
AH	When does a disagreement or dynamic between the two of you transition to becoming teachable material?
MI	In modeling the tools, we use whatever is most relevant for us at the moment, whatever is hottest or least resolved, we just think what is that right now, and there's always something.
RO	We just decide who's going to be the speaker and who's going to be the listener and we often don't know what they're going to bring out.
AH	Okay. In front of your couples?
RO	Yeah.

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AH	Wow!
RO	People always say that was the most valuable part for them.
RO	Watching us work through a conflict.
AH	Not just talking about it, but actually working through in the moment.
RO	In the moment. And we have very structured tools. It's just the speaker has a series of sentence stems. So it really contains it.
AH	Like sentence starters?
RO	Yeah. And it takes you through the whole arc of identifying what's troubling you, how it's impacting you, what emotional allergy you may have that's informing this, what you really want and need instead, how this would help in a specific request for change. So it kind of goes through. It's called the "Empathy Spiral".
AH	The first step is really creating that connection, that empathy, that compassion for the other person's experience.
MI	And for many people, that's not immediately comprehensible to them that you could even sit down feeling really alienated or distant from your partner and in 20 minutes end up feeling a lot of empathy for them even while potentially still feeling differently about the topic.
RO	And then they're willing to take on a really significant issue and work through it in the workshop.
AH	I'm wondering if you'd be willing to share that particular tool.
MI	There's a simpler one that I think would be a better push for that, the one we did on our walk which is a tool to connect in a meaningful way every day.
MI	It's pretty simple, but it just keeps the communication flowing and the pipes clear.
AH	You're listening to Michael and Robin talk about how they counsel couples in crisis.
AH	Is there anything you guys can't help couples with?
MI	Yeah. I was going to say lack of goodwill. That's the only showstopper in my mind. I mean people have to be willing to bring in open mind to...
AH	How do you define goodwill?
MI	It means you're actually there for the purpose of improving your relationship and you may not have faith that that can happen. That doesn't even matter. That doesn't even matter.
AH	So you don't have to believe that it's going to get better.
RO	You just have to want it to get better.

Interviewees: **Alex [A] Zack [Z]; Michael [MI] and Robin [RO]**

Interviewer: Andy Horning [AH]

MI	People have often asked me about saving marriages and my response is always... that's never been a business that I thought I was in. We don't have it that couple staying together is the end point, like the objective in every case. For us, it's about people getting off the fence, getting real about their relationship. So either you're in or you're out and choose, but don't spend 20 years ambivalent about your relationship. To me, that's the tragedy.
AH	So do you experience that a bunch with couples they're like kind of in, kind of out, they're not really committed to one another, they're frustrated, but they're not leaving?
MI	Oh, that's all over the place from my experience. There's a lot of that. Yes. You know hedging your bets one or another or just kind of having whole areas of chronic unhappiness.
RO	Or avoiding.
MI	Especially when couples have children and they get clear that they're not going to stay together to be able to give them the tools to be in a healthy, functioning relationship as parents.
AH	Because they're going to have to co-parent for the rest of their lives.
MI	Exactly.
AH	So what do you notice in your work with couples?
RO	I believe that there's more personal growth certainly for me in the path of staying married, staying committed. And there's a tremendous opportunity to keep growing as I address and work through all of the differences that this brings up. I don't have to work through those on my own. I'm fine living with myself. We have a lot of differences and they say opposites attract, but you know, similarities are the ones that get along. I am in favor of people making that journey if it's healthy for them and sometimes it's not or sometimes it's too late. Sometimes someone just doesn't have the heart or desire anymore. The goodwill is gone and it's just too much water under the bridge.
AH	I want your take on humor in relationships, a lightness, a playfulness in intimate partnerships.
RO	I think humor is essential.
MI	So let's say we're having a conversation, we're hanging out together and all of a sudden, Robin says something and I find really annoying, just really annoying. And I respond in a way that she finds offensive and then typically rather than addressing what I found annoying, she's talking about my failure to communicate in an appropriate manner and then we're off to the races, right? And it can happen fast. We can move from really happy to like seriously annoyed with each other in 30 seconds. And so what happens then? Like what happens next?
AH	What do you do then?

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MI	We've invented something we call "Relationship Performance Art". So how it works is we rewind to the moment when this scene started and Robin describes to me what I would have said in that situation where I her perfect partner and then I do the same for her and then we replay the scene. Now you don't have to actually mean it because sometimes you may not.
MI	But you have to sell it. You have to like play the part with conviction. And it's kind of like whistle a happy tune often we find were little altered from playing the part and have little different point of view.
RO	It's a corrective experience too. It's great to hear what I really wish you had said rather than focus on what he did say that I didn't like, which is otherwise how I'll walk away with that and be grumbling in my mind or I have a whole complaint I need to bring up with him later that's until unresolved versus just immediately, here's what I needed to hear and he said it, great. For things that don't really bear revisiting, you know, it just allows us to move forward.
AH	So do you relate to the wiring new neural pathways as a result of interpersonal relationships, healing? Is that something you talk about much in your work?
MI	One of the things we observe and have observed over years working with hundreds of couples is that in the context we provide for people, most folks are great listening. They are able to set aside their own concerns and issues and really show up for their partner. And even if that's not something they've been doing, you give them an opportunity and encouragement to do that and virtually everyone is really good at that.
MI	On the other hand, watching what people do when they're speaking in their own behalf, when they're asking for what they need, it's so in inept and counterproductive most of the time. Talking about humor, if you showed videotapes of most people asking for what really matters to them and you ask yourself, "Is this perfectly designed not turn out?" I think 95% of the time you would say yes.
AH	So the way they're doing it is guaranteed to fail and not execute the very thing that they're trying to ask for.
RO	Yeah, they don't have the right words.
MI	You know hopelessness and despair and it's vague and it's blaming and you can listen though how people ask for what they want the most and you go, "No one would want to do that." Like yuck.
MI	So that's one of the most important things I think we model and do for people and it's an actual skill set to be able to ask for what really matters in a way that another human would want to respond.
AH	It feels kind of counterintuitive. Because the one they do well at is actually hearing and understanding the other person and the one they often do they fail at is speaking for themselves.
MI	Yes.
AH	Do you call that Skills of Confiding?

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Interviewer: Andy Horning [AH]

RO	Yeah. And it is just giving people the words.
RO	Because yeah, they're not going to rewire their brains to under stress say things in a way that's most effective, but what they can do under stress is pull out these series of sentence stems and finish the sentences and it's guaranteed to turn out then because it gives them that container.
MI	In fact, what inevitably happens in that tool is towards the end of it when people really have said what they need to say and really feel heard and received and understood, invariably there's a piece of self-reflection of taking responsibility for my own part in this issue that without really feeling heard and understood and experiencing empathy, I'm never going to get there, right?
AH	If I go through these tools and share what I need from you, towards the end I'm going to do the very thing that I refuse to do earlier and that is take responsibility from my part.
MI	It's a natural impulse. It's pretty predictable.
AH	When you get the empathy you crave, then you end up almost being empathetic towards yourself which allows you to take responsibility something happens there.
MI	Self-awareness and the desire to connect or feel more of that, transparency happens in a different way.
RO	And gratitude.
RO	At the end, it's what I... it comes to appreciation. What I realized about myself, what I regret about what I realize about myself and what I appreciate about you and what I hope, you know, that's the end.
AH	Oh, I see. That's even part of it too.
AH	What's it like for you guys to work together.
MI	Inevitably I have a sense of love for people even in our short course 24 hours.
RO	Yeah. It's most rewarding work I've ever done. I mean I'm just amaze when I watch that as they empty their jug, we have a tool called "Emptying the Jug" where they talk about all the things they're mad about, all the things you're scared about, all the things you're sad about.
MI	And glad about.
RO	And then comes to glad. It just rises to the surface so readily, so quickly. Sometimes it just doesn't take a lot. So it's very rewarding and that's why I think we love doing it besides it being good for us.
RO	Appreciation. I think we were saying in our walk this morning, there's one thing that's the kind of pillar of what I'd want people to take with them from doing a workshop or even listening to this would be to develop a practice of appreciation, appreciating each other. It's so simple to do. We just tend to focus on the things that we're not happy about or we're not grateful for and we don't like and there's so much good. There's so

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	<p>much to appreciate just in sharing a life with another person. And you know what we focus expands. It's not that we're not going to also deal with what we don't appreciate, that's important too. We've got to reduce the pain. It really expands on the things that we love, are grateful, appreciate. I mean for me it helps me to articulate those things, but it also helps my partner and it helps me when he shares those. We're walking up the hill and down sharing appreciations this morning and it just changes the state. We all need to know I think we're loved and valued and appreciated and to hear it regularly is key. So one of the practices is to make sure we spend at least five minutes a day sharing those things and giving examples, maybe the character qualities, maybe the things you fell in love with, and maybe the little caring behaviors, but every day there's new examples. The more we look, the more there is.</p>
AH	<p>It's interesting because it's almost first acknowledging that we're not wired to do that, that we're wired on some level historically to see the snake as opposed to the stick.</p> <p>So if we acknowledge that then we understand that the way out of that is to focus on the positive because what you focus on, where you put your energy things will grow there. And you're saying in particular specifics help not just general.</p>
MI	<p>I remember a few years ago I was in New York and took a break from being in the public library there and went over to this little coffee shop and it really was packed, really, really crowded. So I ended up sharing a little stand-up table with a man who is like a second-generation immigrant. We kind of had a nice connection and he mentioned that he was getting married. So I let him know that I did couple's education work.</p>
MI	<p>And he said, "Well, okay. Give me one thing. If you got one thing, what is it?" And a hundred things popped in to my head.</p>
MI	<p>And I just looked at him and I said, "Okay. Well, if you're serious about this, here it is. Every day for your life, for the rest of your life spend at least five minutes giving concentrated and specific appreciation to each other. Five minutes a day, I promise you that will change the trajectory of your life."</p>
AH	<p>It will create safety. It will nourish and feed the partnership. I mean how can someone not walk away from those five minutes and feel elevated?</p>
RO	<p>It changes your state in just a few minutes.</p>
AH	<p>Even almost from a body chemical, the oxytocin might get released.</p>
RO	<p>We want people to do it where they're looking at each other and holding hands and physical contact because it just kind of goes in much more deeply. We work with a lot of people where they travel for work or deployed. They can even do it through texting, through email, through FaceTime. It really does matter. It keeps that connection in place. You can do it long distance too.</p>
AH	<p>You've inspired me. I'm going to sit down with Jenny later today and do that. I've realized, you know, with our two kids, with our life, we're moving fast, we're tired as hell at the end of the day, we're busy as hell in the morning, like you forget that. I forget that.</p>
RO	<p>You can do it with the kids too over breakfast or dinner and then what's fun you go around and each person says one thing they appreciate about that and everyone</p>

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	says, "I appreciate you, mom," and each of the kids. It's great for larger family gatherings too but as a daily practice for the family, everyone benefits.
AH	I have a kind of a black and white question for you and boiling it down to this maybe isn't fair, but what do you think is more of a challenge for couples? Loving or being loved? I often wonder about this question that's why asking you.
MI	I think it's different for different people. I think people tend to trend one way or another is their default mode. We often use it doing exercise with people who are we have them hold their palm up and front of each other's chest and get in touch with the sense of connection and then have them do that with themselves and then do both at the same time. Inevitably, that just feels good. That's a good feeling. And then we ask them to imagine in the state of conflict where there's just... it feels like there's an irreconcilable tension between you and me and what we need and want, what typically happens is one of those hands falls away. So I either tend to lose my connection to you and leave or I lose my connection to myself and then I just want to placate you and all my attentions on you.
MI	And of course ironically in both cases, I have it that the solution to the problem is you.
AH	If only you would change.
MI	If only you would change everything would be okay.
RO	That's pretty much where we start and then that quickly shifts, but that only happens when we have a sense that first, you're able to really hear and understand, but then people can get back to my responsibility in the matter and what I can do.
MI	That's the good news and the bad news is it's not about your partner.
AH	You have much more power here than you've realized.
RO	Yeah.
AH	We're all playing the victim card in other words?
RO	Yeah. And it's funny. Sometimes both people are saying, "The other person is the one who's got all the power," and the other one is going, "Oh, it's all them." I'm like, "Somebody has the power here. You're both thinking it's the other person." Both people feel like a victim, but yeah.
AH	Unless you've fixed it and then you're able to help them understand that and they can make that transition then it's a success story.
MI	I think many of us think our own problems are unique and we're particularly messed up and there's something that needs to be sort of kept hidden and secret because it's particularly unsavory or...
AH	If only people knew.
MI	Yeah.

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AH	When in fact it's like we're all in this together.
MI	We're all in this together.
AH	Is that what you found when one person changes often it's enough disruptive kind of dynamic to then it creates a change in the partnership?
RO	Absolutely, yeah.
MI	Well, we'll have some kind of interaction where it's predictable that it's going to kind of go...
AH	You know how this story ends?
MI	Yeah. And then she'll just choose a different tactic. It's like an aikido move. You know I'm kind of ramping up for my standard reaction, we're doing our little routine and all of a sudden, there's no opposition over there.
MI	Yeah. And it's a little disorienting and I also feel challenged to up my game, it's like, "Whoa! Okay."
AH	So it calls you in a way too at a higher level of interaction to a higher level of accountability to yourself and to the partnership.
MI	Yeah.
RO	Yeah, either person can change that and we help people kind of map what we call their emotional allergy loop, their series of reactions, and then develop all these exit ramps, you know all these things I can do, two or three things I can do to interrupt... two or three things you can do to interrupt it and any of them will stop it and then we can have a do over, do what we really want instead.
MI	And for most couples, there is kind of a basic loop that they play out in the kitchen, in the bedroom with the kids.
AH	But each of those locations has kind of a familiar standard story or an ending or...
MI	Way in which we disappoint each other or you know whatever.
RO	We create our core hurts and protect ourselves and yeah, we can dismantle that really quickly.
AH	What's important? What do we not want to miss?
MI	You can get a lot of movement in a short amount of time. They're still sustaining that. That's the long-term work.
AH	But a little bit of work can go a long way.
MI	It can go a really long way.
AH	I'm imagining that when you say that Michael that people may not believe you, like,

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	<p>“Oh, God! The problems are so big here. It’s going to take...” In your experiences, actually no.</p>
MI	<p>Well, like we said they don’t need to believe it. They just need to show up.</p>
AH	<p>Listening to Michael and Robin...I was surprised to hear that most people are better at listening to the other, than at asking for their own needs to be met.</p> <p>It points to our natural inclination to look outwardly and not inwardly. We are not really taught in this culture to go inward and connect with our needs.</p> <p>However, this is shifting. Children 100 years ago were taught to take of their adults emotional needs. I see a shift happening in that parenting model. Today, more and more children are encouraged to know their needs. And, ever more parents are taking responsibility for meeting their own needs.</p> <p>THANK YOU TO ALEX AND ZACK AND MICHAEL AND ROBIN, FOR PARTICIPATING WITH US TODAY.</p> <p>FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES ON THIS EPISODE, FIND OUR SHOW NOTES AT ELEPHANTTALK.ORG.</p> <p>ELEPHANT TALK IS PRODUCED BY KIM POLETTI.</p> <p>OUR THEME MUSIC IS BY ROB BURGER.</p> <p>AUDIO PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY LESLIE GASTON-BIRD AND JOSH KERN.</p> <p>PLEASE REVIEW THE SHOW IN ITUNES - YOUR FEEDBACK IS GREATLY APPRECIATED.</p> <p>THANK YOU FOR LISTENING. I’M YOUR HOST ANDY HORNING. THIS IS REAL LOVE. THIS IS ELEPHANT TALK.</p>
	<p>END FILE</p>