

## Managing Relationship Misconceptions

Gillian and her husband Bob both held responsible corporate positions. Togetherness was the theme of their nine-year-old marriage. Although they shared responsibility for their home chores, Gillian was feeling extremely overextended and frazzled. When she came to discuss the problem with me, we learned that she had no model at all for how to live in a relationship in which both partners worked. As we explored her experience with relationships, she explained that her parents had a very traditional and very happy marriage. Her mother never worked outside her home, had many interests of her own, and when her dad was home, focused her attention on him. Gillian realized that she was imitating their relationship, without any conscious thought. She assumed that it was her job to keep Bob happy by doing whatever he wanted to do. Gillian "just knew" that Bob wanted her constant attention, although they had never discussed the issue. The problem was that working over fifty hours a week, and focusing so much attention on Bob left her almost no time for herself. She made a list of about a dozen things that she missed doing in her life and started doing some of them. She started with reading books she enjoyed while Bob watched TV in another room. He did not seem to notice. She progressed to taking a weekend trip with her sister, and their relationship went on pretty much as it had before. She even took the risk of saying she would prefer to play the piano when Bob was working outdoors. He didn't mind at all, and even started a couple of projects that did not include her. Several weeks later she cautiously stopped doing some of the little extra tasks she had taken on at work. She cut back her hours, and to her surprise was offered a promotion. Gillian reported that the most important thing she changed as a result of coaching was to decide that she did not need to be all things to all people. In fact, the more time she took for herself, the better all her relationships seemed to be. She finally told me "I can't believe how happy I am now. Others are asking me how I changed so much, and I tell them I am now taking as good care of myself as I do of everyone else." Tip: When you understand that your behavior patterns are often based on automatically copying your past experiences, you will find it easier to experiment with new activities.

## About the Author

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