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## The Value of Stretching

### Thought of the Month: July 2007

Here's how it works. I learn what helps Donna feel safer, happier, and more connected in the marriage. Then I become conscious of doing some of these things even when they are out of my comfort zone (which they usually are). Of course, she is doing the same thing, hopefully.

**EXAMPLE:** It seems like a pain to me to fill up the gas tank unless the gauge is well below empty. (Actually, I get a kick out of seeing just how close I can come to running out.) Of course, this drives Donna crazy! In her world it makes sense to fill up before the warning light comes on. So my stretch is to give up my little game and fill up more often than I think necessary. An even bigger stretch is to fill up for her when I know she will be driving next.

This action does several important things. First, it relieves her frustration and anxiety about running out of gas. Second, it allows me to grow into a more sensible and thoughtful posture about a simple thing. Third, it produces a warm feeling in Donna that I am willing to consider her feelings. Finally, it gives me the chance to be the hero/protector/provider that most of us men want to be.

**EVERYBODY WINS!** Silly example, you say?

A bigger deal is Donna's stretch of hiking, river rafting, skiing and all manner of other physical activities with me (and, of course, there's NASCAR). These things are initially scary or uncomfortable for her. Of course, they make me feel loved and connected. Again, she grows a part of her "lost self" and I appreciate it.

Here's what you can do. Listen carefully to your partner's childhood story to discover what your partner never had; what they were frustrated with; what they were scared of. If the childhood story is not apparent, it's okay. Just take the current frustrations, deprivations, or anxieties. Then do one small thing that you will contribute to a safer, more connected feeling in your partner. Notice how this will feel unused or maybe even uncomfortable to you. Don't be surprised if this unusual, uncomfortable feeling goes away after a time.

One of my biggest stretches ever was to have couples in our home for the weekend workshop. It made me feel very uncomfortable to be "invaded" like that. But now I genuinely look forward to welcoming the couples into our home for the weekend.

Growth happens...but never without conscious stretching.

*With great encouragement and hope,*  
David and Donna

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