

JOY RECOVERY

The Shoulds Audit

Finding the ledger underneath your recovery

MEN'S PATHWAY · WORKSHEET

A should is a bill you haven't handed her yet.

About seven months into telling Jacqueline the truth, she doubted something I said, and I started a sentence I never finished. It began with "I've been honest with you for seven months now." She knew where it was going. So did I. The rest of it was that she should trust me by now and she shouldn't be asking me this.

There was an invoice inside that sentence. Because I provided seven months of honesty, payment was due, and she was late.

This worksheet takes a week. You catch the shoulds as they happen, you dig out the invoice under each one, and then you trade it for a sentence you can actually stand behind.

I'll tell you what I don't think it does. A worksheet doesn't dismantle entitlement. Entitlement got built over years of practice and it comes apart the same way, slowly, in front of witnesses. What this does is make the thinking visible so there's something to work on.

None of this goes to your partner. Not the finished pages, not the yardage number in Part Four, not your ownership sentences in Part Six. If you hand her this worksheet to demonstrate how hard you're working, you have converted a self-examination tool into a fresh invoice, and she will feel the bill even if you can't see yourself sending it.

How To Use It

Print it. Keep it somewhere you'll actually see it, because a should evaporates in about ninety seconds and you will not recover it later.

Work Parts One and Two live, across seven days. Sit down with Parts Three through Seven once at the end of the week.

Then run the whole thing again in a month. A first pass usually catches the loud ones. The quiet ones take longer to hear, and I'm not certain anybody hears all of them.

Part One: Catch the Shoulds

Seven days. Every time you catch a should or a should not pointed at your partner, write it in the words your head actually used. Sanding it down while you record it defeats the purpose. If the thought was that she's being ridiculous and she should be over this, then write that.

Some of the shapes it takes:

- She should trust me by now.
- She shouldn't be asking me that again.
- She should notice how much I have changed.
- She shouldn't need to check my phone anymore.
- She should be further along than this.
- She shouldn't bring this up in front of the kids.
- She should give me credit for volunteering it instead of getting caught.
- She shouldn't be this upset over something this small.

Day	What was happening	The should, in my own words

Part Two: Find the Invoice

Take each should from Part One and finish both halves of the transaction. Write what you actually believe underneath it, and not the version that would sound reasonable if you read it out loud to somebody.

The should	Because I ...	She owes me ...
<i>She should trust me by now.</i>	<i>gave her seven months of honesty</i>	<i>the benefit of the doubt when she has a question</i>

Part Three: Test the Invoice

Take the invoices you just wrote and run all four questions against them. Answer in writing. Answering in your head is how these survive.

1. What did I actually provide?

Write it as behavior, with dates. Effort and intention are not payments, and neither is how badly you wanted to do better.

2. Who set the price, and who agreed to it?

Answer plainly whether she ever consented to these terms, or whether you set the terms alone and started counting.

3. How long is the other side of the record?

Years of deception on one side. Months of honesty on the other. Write both numbers down where you can see them together.

4. What do I do when the payment doesn't arrive?

The behavior, and not the feeling. Part Five will help you find it if nothing comes to mind right away.

Part Four: The Track Record Check

Turn your years of deception into a football field, one hundred yards end to end. Then put your months of honesty on the same scale.

$$\text{yards of honest track record} = (\text{months of honesty} \div \text{months of deception}) \times 100$$

Twenty years of deception is 240 months, which is the whole field. Seven months of honesty works out to 2.9 yards. He was standing on the three-yard line asking her to disregard the other ninety-seven.

Months of deception (years $\times$ 12):

Months of consistent honesty since her discovery:

My yards: (_____ $\div$ _____) $\times$ 100 =

Treat this as a picture rather than a schedule. Nothing in it says that reaching some yard line earns her trust, or that her healing runs on a proportion. Trust is hers to extend on her own timing, or to withhold. Running this number in front of her would be one more invoice.

Part Five: Where the Unpaid Bill Goes

An invoice that goes unpaid turns into resentment, and resentment leaks. It usually leaks as behavior she has to absorb rather than as anything you say out loud. Check anything you did in the last seven days.

- ☐ Went quiet or gave short answers after she asked a question
- ☐ Sighed, went flat, or let my face do the arguing
- ☐ Mentioned how long it has been since discovery
- ☐ Mentioned how much work I have been doing
- ☐ Compared us to another couple who seemed further along

- Pointed out an inconsistency of hers during a conversation about my behavior
- Told a friend, a family member, or a group that she's stuck
- Withdrew affection, attention, or ordinary warmth
- Described myself to someone as walking on eggshells
- Turned the conversation until I was the one being wronged
- Delayed telling her something because I decided she couldn't handle it
- Asked her when she thinks she'll be ready to move on

Pick the one that did the most damage this week. Write what she experienced on the other side of it, in her words if you know them.

Part Six: Trade the Should for an Ownership Sentence

An ownership sentence has three properties. It states what you did in behavioral terms, it hands the decision back to her, and it asks for nothing in return. If the second half of your sentence contains a “but,” the invoice is still in there wearing better clothes.

The should	The ownership sentence
<i>She should trust me by now.</i>	<i>I conditioned her over years not to trust me. Seven months of honesty is early evidence, and what it's worth is hers to decide.</i>

These sentences are for you. Reading them to her as proof of growth turns them straight back into invoices.

Part Seven: One Behavior for the Coming Week

One thing. Observable, so that somebody outside your head could tell whether you did it. An attitude to hold doesn't count here.

The behavior:

When it happens:

How she would know it happened:

Who is checking with me:

Where This Comes From

You can skip this part and the worksheet still works. It's here because men in this room tend to do better when they can see that the resistance they're running into is ordinary human machinery rather than her being unreasonable.

Trust is accepted vulnerability

The philosopher Annette Baier described trust as accepted vulnerability to another person's possible ill will. You hand somebody the power to hurt you while believing they won't use it. That is what your partner did for years before discovery. When you press her to trust you again, you are asking her to hand you back the same weapon.

Baier, A. C. (1986). Trust and Antitrust. Ethics, 96(2), 231–260.

Three components, and you broke the hardest one

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman described trust as resting on three perceptions of the other person: ability, benevolence, and integrity. Deception damages all three. Integrity is the hardest to rebuild, because a lie gets read as information about who somebody is rather than as a bad day.

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust. Academy of Management Review, 20(3), 709–734.

Trust breaks faster than it builds

Paul Slovic described an asymmetry between trust and distrust. Negative events are more visible than positive ones, they carry more weight, and distrust tends to reinforce itself once it takes hold. A hundred honest days read as ordinary days. One lie reads as an event.

I should say plainly that Slovic studied public trust in institutions and risk managers, not marriages. Applying it to your kitchen table is an extension on my part. It has held up in every room I have sat in, and I still want you to know it is an extension.

Slovic, P. (1993). Perceived Risk, Trust, and Democracy. Risk Analysis, 13(6), 675–682.

One Last Thing

Proverbs puts it about as well as anything I have read. Reliance on the unfaithful in a time of trouble is like a broken tooth or a lame foot (Proverbs 25:19, NIV).

I broke a tooth a couple of years ago and never once decided to chew on the other side. My mouth just did it. That is what you are asking her nervous system to override every time she considers believing you.

Tear up the invoice. Stop counting honest days as currency. Build a record so consistent that it becomes boring, and let her decide what she wants to do with it.

Roy

Joy Recovery provides education and coaching programs. We do not provide psychotherapy, diagnosis, or mental health treatment. If you are working with a clinician, bring this worksheet to them.