

# How to Maintain Healthy Relationships

The most important numbers you could learn to maintain healthy relationships are five and one. That is the ratio of positive interactions to negative ones that predicts whether a relationship will last or become one of the sad statistics of divorce.

John Gottman, at the University of Washington, has conducted research on marriages that suggests there is a "**magic ratio**" of **5 to 1** positive to negative interactions. Back in 1992, Gottman and his research team recruited 700 couples who had just received their marriage licenses. For each couple, the researchers videotaped a 15-minute conversation between husband and wife and counted the number of positive and negative interactions. Then, based on the 5 to 1 ratio, they predicted whether each couple would stay together or divorce.

Ten years later, Gottman and his colleagues followed up with each couple to determine the accuracy of their predictions. They predicted the couples' divorces with an incredible 94% accuracy. And this ratio is critical in the workplace as well.

A recent study found that **workgroups with positive to negative interaction ratios greater than 3 to 1 are significantly more productive** than teams that do not reach this ratio. Research also suggested the existence of an *upper limit*. Things can worsen if the ratio goes higher than 13 to 1.

So, it is just as important that teammates not ignore issues; *all positivity must be grounded in reality*. A false or blind optimism and positivity can become counterproductive -- and sometimes downright annoying. There are times when it's necessary to correct mistakes and figure out how to manage problems.

The teammates whose relationships thrive do share negative comments, but also manage to deliver positive emotional messages that balance out the negatives and establish trust where both feel that there is a sincerely constructive intent.

Dr. Gottman's "balance theory" of relationships implies the unusual point of view that negativity is important in healthy partnerships. Negativity allows teammates and spouses to identify patterns that don't work. A relationship without conflict would not be able to move forward productively.

But if those negative comments are not balanced by positive or affirming remarks, they become far more damaging, which is why many attempts at "feedback" actually diminish performance and lead to lower productivity.

