

Inspiration *for the* Book

*“Success is never final. Failure is never fatal.
It’s courage that counts.”*

—*They Call Me Coach*, John Wooden, basketball coach, author

This work has been inspired by the many courageous men who have come to my office wanting to be better men. It has been my honor to walk beside these men as they courageously faced their defeats, triumphs, fears, desires, and choices. I have witnessed their fierce determination to make things right at home and to become stronger leaders, better role models, and men whose integrity could no longer be called into question.

Often driven by crisis, these men come to realize that instead of facing the challenges of life head on, they have been engaging in behaviors that are out of alignment with their own core values and beliefs. For many, this behavior included the betrayal of someone they love.

I sat with these men through their anguish, grief, shame, and search for greater meaning and purpose. I listened to their stories and helped them put their lives back together, and, in most cases, recover their relationship. I witnessed the hard work, dedication, and commitment these determined men put into making the changes necessary to support their own growth and healing, and into helping their relationships recover, heal, rebuild trust, and forge a deeper and more meaningful connection with those they love.

I would be remiss to not also include the amazing women I have worked with— women who chose to stand face-to-face with the men they love and walk through the burning embers of their own fears, longings, and discontents. Engaging in

transformational work of this nature necessitates shoring up the edges of your own boundaries and cultivating a deeper intimacy with life itself. Your willingness to authentically engage in the work, honor your own needs, and keep your heart open enough to walk through the fire of transformation and healing, sets the stage for rebuilding your life and relationship in ways you might never have imagined. I applaud your strength and courage.

It is to these men, and the women who love them that I dedicate this work. I am honored by your faith and trust in me. It has been my privilege to guide you and learn from you. I wish you beauty, grace, continued self-awareness, and healing. I wish you the courage to continue to kindly and directly ask for what you want, to choose love even when it scares you to do so, to set self-supportive boundaries, to offer apologies and forgiveness for missteps, and to continue to listen to the callings of your own heart and those of your beloved's. May you know the experience of being fully alive and deeply loved exactly as you are, and may you continue to learn, grow, and expand in loving yourselves and each other.

And to you, my reader, I also commend your courage and willingness to take a deep dive into your own healing and recovery. The information on these pages has been designed to educate and offer you the opportunity to take a deeper look at who you are, the factors that set the stage for your choices, and determine who you want to be walking forward. I am honored to serve as your guide.

Dr. Jeanne Michele

Introduction

“Your soul print is etched with the lines of your pathologies and fears, your hopes and your dreams, your memories, angers, and all of those irreplaceable, fully special pieces that make up in a unique combination the woven fabric of your story.”

—Marc Gafni, *Soul Prints, Your Path to Fulfillment*

The unique tapestry of who we are is woven from all of our experiences, challenges, and choices, including those we struggle with and regret. Part of our journey as human beings is to more fully awaken into the power and passion that resides within, embrace the unique expression of who we are, and experience the healing and trans-formative power of loving and being deeply loved.

When we can make peace with our past and view our missteps as lessons that lead us towards more mindful ways of living and loving, we are able to be more fully present with our loved ones and more consistently make choices that reflect our core values, beliefs, and commitments. Mastering this way of thinking requires focused attention, patience, and a willingness to release the judgments we hold against ourselves and others and recover from whatever takes us out of alignment with ourselves and those we love.

Any form of deep recovery work serves as a kind of personal soul retrieval offering opportunities to cultivate a greater depth of understanding, self-discovery, forgiveness, and reclamation. Affair recovery is no different. As cliché as it sounds, the more you are able to love, value, understand, accept, and forgive yourself, the greater your

capacity to do the same for others. Infidelity recovery does have its unique challenges in that successful recovery also necessitates working directly with someone who has been impacted and hurt by choices they did not make.

The work you are embarking upon is designed to help you gain insight into yourself, your partner and the nature of relationships and affairs. It offers you the opportunity to increase your ability as Socrates is reported to have said to, “Know Thyself.” In addition to expanding your self-awareness, you will also be learning how to best help both you and your partner recover and create a more solid connection moving forward, whether or not you ultimately choose to stay together.

My journey into infidelity recovery began to take root as more and more men began showing up in my practice who were devastated at the possibility of losing their wives and families after *their* affair. This inspired me to explore the intricacies of affairs and affair recovery, uncover their commonalities, embrace the unique journey of each person and situation, and fine-tune ways to help these men and their partners heal, gain the clarity they needed to make wise choices, and reignite their connection, or clearly and amicably honor each other’s choice to go in another direction.

In *The State of Affairs*, psychotherapist and author, Esther Perel writes, “Affairs have a lot to teach us about relationships. They open the door to a deep examination of values, human nature, and the power of eros. They force us to grapple with some of the most unsettling questions: What draws people outside the lines they worked so hard to establish? Why does sexual betrayal hurt so much? ... For me these conversations are part and parcel of any adult relationship.”

Well managed infidelity recovery between willing partners can enhance relational authenticity, foster greater understanding, improve a couple’s ability to actively listen and engage, and help promote healing from previous relational trauma. It offers the opportunity to look at ways in which your life and relationship had bumped up against obstacles, both internal and external, that became more difficult to successfully sort through.

I am by no means suggesting that infidelity is an exclusively male tendency. But in my practice, there have simply been more men knocking on my door seeking reconciliation, so I set out to write the first book for and about men, male affair behavior, relationships, and recovery.

The truth is infidelity, in its many forms, occurs more often than people think. But since there is a hidden shame associated with it, personal affair behavior isn't typically a voluntary topic of social conversation. In fact, it is even difficult to quantify infidelity statistics, since participants are presumed to be hesitant to report affairs. Estimates of lifetime infidelity amongst heterosexual Americans have varied wildly— for men, from 12 to 72 percent, and for women, 7 to 54 percent.³

Rumors of affair engagement by *other people* make tabloid headlines and serve as tasty food for neighborhood gossip. When judgments turn personal, however, they take on a whole new meaning. Being the subject of speculation, rumors, and gossip opens up an unimaginable world of pain and suffering for all involved.

So, why do we judge so harshly? Perhaps we judge to measure where we stand in comparison to others. Maybe seeing someone else falter helps us feel better about ourselves or judge our own failings less harshly. Sometimes judgments yield a sense of moral superiority.

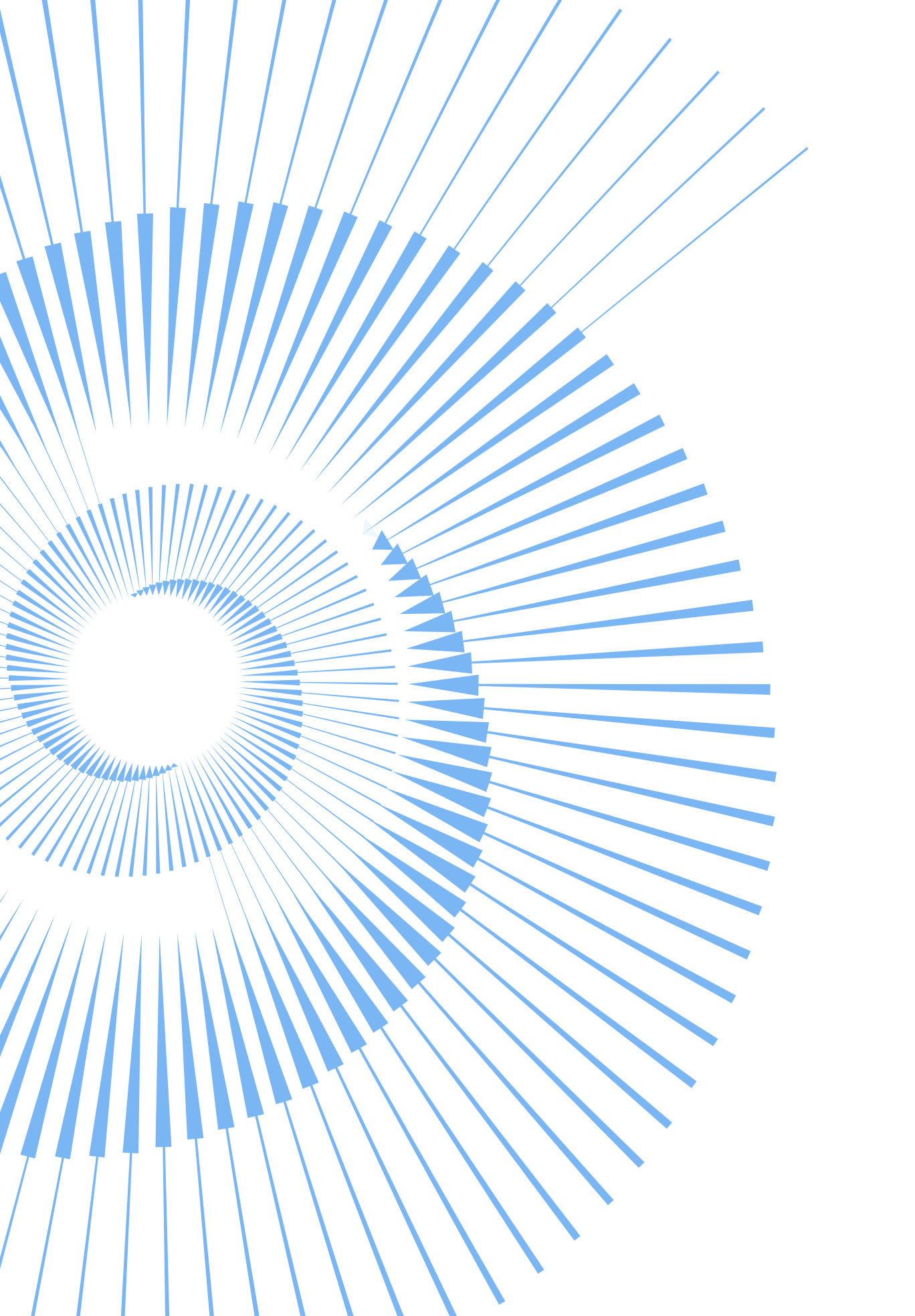
“It’s easy to judge. It’s more difficult to understand. Understanding requires compassion, patience, and a willingness to believe that good hearts sometimes choose poor methods.”

—Doe Zantamata, *Happiness in Your Life - Book One: Karma*

The men who have shown up in my office have been earnest in their desire to figure out what happened and why, learn how to rebuild their relationship and their lives, recover their dignity, help their partner heal, be forgiven, and forgive themselves. The work I share in this book is based upon my direct experience helping these men courageously face their choices, regain their self-respect, and rebuild their relationships and their lives.

Throughout this book, you will be introduced to these men. You will hear their stories, gain insight into what they wrestled with, and learn how they put their lives back together after their affairs. While the details have been changed to protect the privacy of all involved, each story represents a journey in and through an affair.

Whether you are the man who has had an affair, or a woman affected by an affair, I hope you can find yourself in some of these stories, and that they offer you a ray of hope and let you know that you are not alone.





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Recovery Process Timeline

“Martin Luther King, Jr., understood that underneath all of the struggle and sorrow there is a force of life that is unstoppable.”

—Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart*

This work offers you too the opportunity to activate within you that “*force of life that is unstoppable.*” Doing so requires grit and guts. If you are a solution-driven man who thinks on his feet, you may find the ability to both act and have patience difficult. In any type of recovery work, especially the work involving yourself and another person, both are required.

Many people ask how long infidelity recovery takes. While this differs among couples, solid recovery typically takes at least a year. That doesn’t mean that after a year the topic is never brought up again. It does mean that the frequency and intensity of triggers and discussions is significantly lower. The couples who do the best are the ones who set aside time each week to actively work on recovering and rebuilding their relationship. Recovery is both an individual and a relational process.

It is important for you to find the balance between offering comfort and giving her space. Be patient with her emotional highs and lows as best you can without taking it

personally, as her needs and moods will fluctuate. If you are unsure what she needs, ask. Here are some suggested questions: *What do you need from me right now? Do you need time to yourself, or would you like to connect? How can I support you? Would you like a hug? Would you like to go for a walk or a drive?*

As a couple, it is important for each of you to carve out time to explore your own wants, needs, and desires, and learn how to best communicate and actively listen to each other.

The following timetable offers an approximate window into diligent recovery and an overall theme for each period. This process is not linear, which means you may feel like things are progressing, then you hit a snag, which feels like a setback. Try not to get discouraged. Movement will fluctuate. **It is important to work through feelings as they occur AND set up reconnection/fun time that excludes talking about the affair.**

Phase I – Months 1 to 4. The predominant question during this time is: Can I ever trust again?

During the first few months, you are both recovering from the shock of what happened. Each person is discerning whether they believe the relationship is salvageable and deciding if they are willing to fully engage in the recovery process. The work involves learning how to best answer questions, set boundaries, and balance the need for connection and space.

- **For the betrayer:** How can I trust myself to ensure that I remain faithful to my commitments?
- **For the betrayed:** How can I ever trust my partner again or feel safe in this relationship?

Phase II – Months 4 to 8. The overriding question during this time is two-fold: Can I truly forgive? What does true forgiveness look like for yourself and from your partner?

You begin diving more fully into the work of self-discovery, cultivating a greater understanding of your partner's emotional state, and learning how to engage in productive conversations. Cultivating behaviors that rebuild trust and reinforce the safety of the relationship are big components of this time frame.

- **For the betrayer:** Can I extend forgiveness to myself for the pain my actions have caused?
- **For the betrayed:** Can I extend forgiveness to my partner for his behavior? Can I forgive myself for not speaking up, perhaps ignoring signals or a gut feeling?

Phase III – Months 8 to 12. The dominant questions during this phase revolve around the partnership: How can we strengthen our connection? How can we create a supportive, loving, trustworthy partnership?

While relational work is an important part of the infidelity recovery process from the beginning, during this phase the affair itself becomes a less frequent focal point. The work involves a more in-depth exploration of what each person wants to create as individuals and as a couple—in the present and into the future. In this phase, you will continue fine-tuning the skills of authentic communication—both listening and speaking your truth. While the topic of the affair can still unexpectedly rear its head, it is occupying less headspace.

- **For both parties:** What am I willing to do to strengthen our connection? What do I need, want, and desire in this partnership? How can I continue to choose engaging in loving actions over my need to be right?

Phase IV – Months 12 and beyond. The dominant question here is: How can we maintain a thriving connection that fills our needs as individuals, as a couple, and if applicable, as a family?

This is a time of continued building and maintenance. It is important to pay attention to the tendency toward complacency and take care not to slide back into old patterns. Your relationship needs time and attention. Learn how to nurture each other and engage in behaviors that light up each other’s world. It is important to prioritize connection and set aside quality time to work through day-to-day needs as well as engage in planful interactions that feed your connection.

- **For both of you:**
 - o Make a commitment to deeply listen to your partner and pursue curiosity about their interests.
 - o Work through whatever blocks you from more consistently asking for what you need and desire, in a clear manner—without complaint or blame.

Hint: Instead of complaining about what you don’t have/like, kindly and directly ask for what you would like, and then give your partner room to let you know if they are willing/able to provide it.

- o Speak your truth with kindness, compassion, and clarity.

Working through Phase IV can set you up for a solid, satisfying relationship.



Reflection

- Where do you see yourselves on the relational timeline? These timeframes are impacted by the work you are doing as well. If you are just beginning to dive into the work, you may be chronologically in stage three or four, but from a recovery perspective you may be in stage one or two.
- What would you like your relationship to look like? While the exploration of this question will be ongoing throughout your review of the material/recovery, it doesn't hurt to start thinking about that early in the process. Creating a vision for your relationship gives you something to work toward.
- What are your most challenging aspects of the recovery process thus far?

In the next segment, we are going to dive into affair discovery, its associated dilemmas, and the feelings stirred.