

The Trampoline

Part Two

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Understanding What The Names On Your Trampoline Mean

This second part of “The Trampoline” is geared to provide insight, plus a game plan for strengthening one’s Trampoline if needed. It is not intended to make one feel guilty or inadequate. However, if pieces of what follows speak to your life, then this is an opportunity for personal growth and perhaps healing. There is definitely light at the end of this tunnel.

The long-term mission field is decidedly not a place to run away from personal inadequacies or problems. Who we are as persons, our character strengths and weaknesses, our social skillsets, our relational health or deficiencies, and our overall mental and spiritual health, follows people like their shadows and once on the field they will be tested. What follows therefore in Part Two is a thought-provoking assessment of your Trampoline.

Section E — Understanding What The Numbers of Springs Mean

1. Emotionally healthy people generally have somewhere near **4–6** relationships (“springs”) on **each** of the four sides of their “Trampoline,” for a sum total of **16 - 24** *meaningful* relationships in their lives. Some have many more, and some less. Extraverts sometimes have more relationships than introverts, and that’s normal. Many of these supportive folks are somewhat integrated, that is, many know one another, or at least know *of* one another.
2. When the relationships on one side are weak or non-existent, it is possible to compensate by building more relationships on another side. E.g., a person with only one or two “springs” (i.e., significant relationships) on Sides One and Two may make up for this with more “springs” on sides Three and Four. The *sum* total of caring and supportive relationships is more important than having equal numbers on each side.
3. Generally speaking, when one has too few “springs” on their Trampoline, there are precipitating issues rooted in their childhood Family-of-Origin, and/or their marriage. When Primary Family relationships are damaged, the impact is frequently felt on all sides of the Trampoline ~ and often for a lifetime. It is most helpful for relationship healing in general, if repair can begin at home on Side One, where damage often initially occurred. Naturally, this is not always possible.

4. When one has only 8 – 12 total meaningful relationships in their “Trampoline,” they may tend toward being somewhat isolated, and perhaps somewhat emotionally unhealthy. *When crisis strikes, relationally unsupported individuals tend to have less emotional stability, resilience, coping skills, emotional reserve, and lower “bounce-back-ability.”*

Other traits worth noting in weakly supported Trampolines:

- a. Often, many of the individuals on the four sides don’t know one another – they’re not connected or linked together so as to be able to coordinate supportive efforts if needed
- b. Frequently the person with a weak Trampoline feels isolated and recognizes their “attachment field” is weak
- c. Frequently there are issues of boundaries, trust or control driving the person’s difficulty in making or keeping relationships
- d. Frequently the person was wounded by their early childhood family system, and their lack of attachment in adulthood is an extension of this wounding
- e. There is sometimes a broad-brush correlation between being more isolated and being perceived as somewhat “odd.” (And if a person is “odd” in the States, they’ll likely be seen as “odd” by indigenous people as well.)

This does *not* mean this person is unqualified for missionary work, but it *does* mean their tenure on the mission field may be more difficult and even shorter term, than for those with stronger attachments (i.e., “springs”).

5. When one has only 4-6 meaningful relationships, these relationships often tend toward being “caretaking” in nature:
 - a. Who’s going to make sure Harry takes his pills today?
 - b. Junette got her feelings hurt at church ~ someone needs to stop by and check on her because she can’t take care of this sort of problem by herself
 - c. We haven’t seen Willard in a month now ~ does anyone know if he’s OK?
 - d. Jill tends to drink when she’s lonely ~ is anyone inviting her into their life?
 - e. When marital couples become isolated they can become one another’s caretakers, which tends to pathologize the marital relationship. This type of marriage is often held together more by interlocking pathologies than by healthy commitment, respect, boundaries, relational support, and love.
 - f. Addictions of any kind usually reflect a lack of meaningful relationships, especially honest same-sex accountability relationships.

Questions for personal assessment:

1. As you assess your Trampoline, how do the overall numbers look to you? Are you surrounded by sufficient meaningful relational “springs” so that when (not if) things get

lonely and stressful on the field, you are certain your overall relational infilling and refilling will be there for you?

Write your answer: _____

2. As you assess the *quality* of your relational support system (i.e., your Trampoline) do you have a “history” of connection and love with these people? Are you very sure they will actually be praying for you on a regular basis. Will they “be there” for you if you need them? Are they rock solid ~ have they proven to be rock solid for you in the past few years?

Write your answer: _____

Section F — Understanding What Insufficient Springs Imply About Relational Support and Likely Field Stability

As has been noted above, having too few “springs” around one’s trampoline often reflects unresolved childhood issues, most often coming from one’s Family-Of-Origin. These wounds often become controlling personal and relational dynamics in adulthood. The following a - z list provides common symptoms of such wounds. There are many more ~ this is just a sampling. Generally speaking, the more emotionally wounded a person is coming out of childhood, the greater the number of these traits may be seen in their personalities and relationships.

- a. Diminished social skillset ~ AKA lower social IQ
- b. Coping mechanisms born of anxiety arising from attachment deficit
- c. Fear of attachment
- d. Difficulty in making and sustaining attachment
- e. Boundary-related issues (i.e, not having any boundaries; or, having very rigid boundaries)
- f. Negative attachment modality (e.g., maintaining attachment through arguing or bickering; or through frequent power-related conflict)
- g. Emotionally distant attachment modality (“I love you as long as you live at least 500 miles away from where I live.”)

- h. Low self-esteem; neediness
- i. Inappropriate risk-taking; or conversely, a fierce avoidance of risk-taking
- j. Hidden secrets (which may be unintentionally discovered through close relationships ~ e.g., addictions, stories of rejection or failure, etc.)
- k. Defense mechanisms which hinder adult attachment and closeness
- l. History of conflict with family members (particularly parents or siblings)
- m. Adoption of inappropriate Family-Of-Origin roles (e.g., “Hero,” “Scapegoat,” “Lost Child,” “Rebel”)
- n. Tendency toward making rapid attachments with members of opposite sex
- o. Tendency toward either extreme emotional dependence, or independence
- p. Tendency toward emotional fragility ~ keeping emotional distance so that one can’t be hurt
- q. Tendency to hurt others ~ the axiom is true: “Hurt people, hurt people”
- r. Tendency to have control issues ~ either an inappropriate need for extreme control, or a fear of being in control with accompanying need for others to control them
- s. Tendency to closely align with powerful people, and/or abuse power in relationships
- t. Tendency to either have roller-coaster feelings, or ignore/deny feelings altogether
- u. History of conflict with people in authority (bosses, pastors, teachers, etc.)
- v. Tendency to be rigid in personality structure and function
- w. Tendency to have only one close friend (if any)
- x. Tendency to fill relational emptiness with positional power (being “the boss”)
- y. Tendency to engage in compulsive forms of “self-feeding” to fill relational emptiness (e.g., over-eating; sexual practices; being super-duper religious)
- z. Much emotional energy given to hiding personal weaknesses or failures

Again, this is just a sampling. And almost everyone has one or two of these kinds of traits. But the point is that when people live with unresolved relational issues, there are usually broken bits and pieces laying around in their clinical histories. These “pieces” are seen in nonexistent, failed or emotionally distant relationships; patterns of unresolved anger, fear, loss or sadness; maintaining emotional distance; maintaining dysfunctional habits in personality and relational styles. And these tendencies usually correlate with the number and quality of relationships in people's Trampolines.

This is why gaining some understanding of the quantity and meaningfulness of relationships in one’s personal Trampoline can be a helpful measure of emotional health and likely stability. If one has inadequate springs around their trampoline, it speaks to many issues.

Questions for Personal Assessment

1. How many of the a-z list in Section F seem to apply to your life? What does this tell you about your likely resilience if serious problems arise on the field?

Write your answer: _____

2. How does what you have learned about yourself in Section F, seem to apply to your overall quantity and quality of relationships, and how might this affect your life when facing the isolation and stress of the first couple of years on the field?

Write your answer: _____

Section G — Strengthening Your Trampoline

This section provides insight regarding how to improve one’s overall Trampoline, based upon information learned as a result of the previous six sections.

Tips For Building A Strong Trampoline:

In order to thrive and last in ministry, one must constantly tend their Trampoline. The most dangerous people in positions of spiritual responsibility, are those who are most relationally isolated. They are the ones most likely to act out in ways that harm others, reflecting badly upon both their organization and the cause of Christ.

What follows are eight tips for improving one’s Trampoline, and thereby one’s mental health, if you determine that your number of “Springs” is low and you wish to make improvements.

1. First, it's helpful to ponder why this is so. The more one understands their own reasons for having too few "springs," the more equipped they'll be for change. Take a little time, do some deep thinking. Jot down your thoughts. How did you get to the point of having too few springs around your Trampoline? Why has it made sense to have a limited number of "springs" in your Trampoline? Write your answer: _____

2. It's also helpful to revisit and resolve boundary issues in one's Family-of-Origin (often requires the help of a trained therapist). Were dad or mom too invasive or controlling? Too absent? Too strict, or lenient? Were your personal boundaries respected at home? Were you able to trust mom and dad? Did they nurture and care for you, or did you need to protect yourself from them? What has been their larger impact in your life? Write your answer: _____

3. Courage is needed to overcome fear of attachment, and to risk trusting. What fears currently keep you from pursuing new relationships? Low self-esteem? History of relational pain? Rejection? Introverting personality? Fear of initiating relationships/ What will you need to *overcome through personal courage*, in order to begin making new relationships and strengthening the ones you already have? Write your answer: _____

4. It helps to form a plan and set goals regarding building and keeping healthy relationships. Start out with one or two goals. Write them down. Commit yourself to achieving them. Add some "next steps" that will move you forward. Then start doing what you wrote.
 Initial goals: _____

 Next steps: _____

5. When building one's number of springs, it's wisest and most helpful to build on same-sex "springs." Opposite sex relationships are always more complex and dangerous, especially if you're already somewhat "spring deficient." Keep your "spring-support" composed of same-sex buddies.

6. It's essential to *take initiative* when building and maintaining one's "springs." Do not wait for others to do this for you. Reach out — learn to be appropriately vulnerable — join in conversations without having to be invited — pursue people with whom you'd like to have a closer relationship. This is not an easy exercise, because if your number of "springs" is too small, you likely have reasons for this. You've likely built a life around functioning with too few springs and you may need to change your relational priorities and patterns. It's emotionally challenging, and nobody's going to do this for you. Challenge your fears.

7. Make a personal commitment to make relationship-building into a lifetime habit. People don't usually change willingly or easily. We tend to dig deeper into our personal caves when feeling unsure of ourselves. So make a personal commitment to this project. Create some sort of symbol that regularly reminds you of your commitment. Hang it on your refrigerator, or bathroom mirror — where you'll see it daily and be reminded.

8. It's a good goal to surround one's Trampoline with at least 16 - 24 solid springs. There's nothing magic about the numbers 16 - 24, yet that's a reasonably good goal to have. Don't quit when you reach eight or ten. There are many good reasons for you to keep building until you're well into that target range. You're actually building a good mental health system for yourself.

Questions for Personal Assessment

1. What have you learned about yourself and your relational support system through this Trampoline exercise?

Write your answer: _____

2. Critical incidents on the mission field are far more numerous than they are in the States. If you were to be seriously injured, or violated, or imprisoned, or had some other seriously difficult event in your life, are you surrounded by a solid group of people who would immediately be in prayer for you, and would also do everything in their power to go to bat for you?

Write your answer: _____

Wrap

This Trampoline exercise is basically a study of one's "attachment field." In the field of psychology, one's "attachment field" is that set of close and meaningful relationships that we've explored in this exercise.

This Trampoline paradigm has a lot to do with your likely future as a missionary. Whether your Trampoline is strong or weak, either way it speaks to your probability of actually pursuing others, forming deep and lasting relationships once on the field. Being a missionary is all about forming relationships. If a person is relatively comfortable creating and maintaining healthy relationships in the States, then they're likely to use that skillset on the field as well. Conversely, the person who is not comfortable creating and maintaining relationships in the States, will likely duplicate their skillset on the field. The place where this issue will most likely show itself will be in the missionary's ability to make and sustain meaningful relationships leading to salvation and church planting.

A person who has a strong Trampoline in the States, will be much more likely to keep building their Trampoline when on the field. One with a weak Trampoline in the States will likely continue with that challenge on the field. The time when this issue will most likely show its strength or weakness will be when some level of crisis hits. Those with stronger Trampolines will generally exhibit greater resilience and higher likelihood of remaining on the field

If through this study you've found that your Trampoline is strong and healthy, both numerically and qualitatively, then thank God for this gift and continue on in your pursuit of this calling. However, if you have discovered that your Trampoline is weak, it's probably wise to begin actively strengthening it, especially while you're in the States and things are easier due to language and culture. In the process you will develop a team of holy warriors around yourself, and you will develop relational skillsets that will serve you well once on the field.

God be with you.

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* Credit must be given. In his book, "*Bonding*," (Word, 1985) author Dr. Donald Joy titles chapter one, "Who Is Holding Your Trampoline?" His concept stuck in my mind when I first read the book decades ago. Since then I have developed further thoughts around it, using the Trampoline model conceptually in training, diagnostics and treatment. Thank you, Dr. Joy.