



CUPS & GLASSES

a simple story about how to do
relationships better

by owen d baker

This could be the smallest book that has ever tackled the biggest challenge that has faced us as a civilization since the beginning of time. It dogs us in our current day and it will be a source of confusion until time ends. We watch movies about it, read bestsellers about it, and pay millions of dollars in some lame attempt as to try to finally figure it out.

I'm talking about relationships – specifically marriage. But really any intersection between two or more people presents the potential for problems. Relationships at work, or between groups, siblings, even nations can solve their age-old problems if they simply read these few, seemingly simple pages. For what lies in these next few lines is a formula, call it a secret, if you will, that can reveal the opening to new, enlightened conversations with an age-old adversary: your spouse.

I'm assuming that some of the points I'm going to make will sound familiar to you – almost elementary. But, then again, you'll need to ask yourself, if you're so smart, why isn't your relationship working in your marriage, or in your office? The lesson I learned came from the most unusual beginning.

This story starts with The Square Cup, a coffeehouse in rural Nebraska, smack in the middle of cornfields. We have been running it since 2003. By a long shot, it has been more a labor of love than a global coffee enterprise. But even though Kari, my wife, and I knew it was a venture that would take a while to build, it was never intended to be a venture that would bring us so much discouragement. Existing on highway 81, in Stromsburg, a town of only 1,200 people, you easily run out of customers before you run out of espresso. The toll of this daily grind seemed to be mounting against us. So little return for so much effort left me feeling that we had so few options. But the truth be told there was a secret that I was hiding from myself. Even though I run my own companies and do so fairly successfully, I did not know the language used in business – the language of accounting. Sure, I knew the basics, some terms even. But I didn't know the *language*. That was huge to me. With an epiphany I realized it didn't matter if I made 10 cents or 10 million, if I did not understand the language needed for navigating business, I would forever be exactly where I found myself: ignorant, oblivious and out of options.

So with great gusto, I dove into learning a new language as if I was a student learning French before studying abroad. Hours before sun up, I would sit, listen to online accounting classes, and take notes and replay again and again knowing that I had to know each part before moving ahead. The thing that tripped me up is the thing that trips up most accounting students – debits and credits. One of the lessons taught an obvious point – that one man's credit is another man's debit. Meaning when you look at your bank statement and it shows what is credited to your side of the banking relationship, there is an opposite and equal debit on the bank's side of the relationship. It's obvious with any kind of transaction. If you buy a latte from the Square Cup, I post that transaction as money I gained, you post it as money that has been exhausted. Every transaction operates within this principle.

Always has, always will.

Right at the same time as I was immersed in language lessons for accounting, there happened a singular relational transaction between my wife and me. A conversation that lasted less than one minute, but had I not been focusing on the principle of debits and credits, it's value would have never been captured. This simple exchange between a husband and wife revealed the simple, but incredible truth about relationships that serves me every day. It can serve you, too. If applied, this story, I believe can change your relationship with your spouse, your family, even your co-workers. I believe this simple truth can change any kind of relationship that finds itself strained, broken, or even at war.

It started with a personal quirk for me. To be clear, I'm telling a story, and amping up my drama only to make my point. I'm not extreme, I'm just playing loose with the description of my perspective on a part of life that I like. Just like you want to have your favorite blanket and chair when watching a movie, or the right kind of music when you're working out. I happen to have a strong preference for the kind of glass I use to drink a beverage.

I know, I know, call me weird, but it bugs me if I'm drinking from a cup or a glass that is either spotty, or sized wrong, or whatever. If I'm drinking wine, the glass can make or break my experience. If I'm served a drink in the wrong kind of glass, it bothers me. This isn't to throw me under the bus as some kind of goblet snob – I'm really not. My point is that the glass that I use when I drink anything is meaningful to me; its value is drawn from the simple fact that it makes me happy. That's it. End of story.

That's part one of the formula.

So, you can guess that when the glass cups that I use for my morning coffee start to get etched in the dishwasher cycle, I start looking for a replacement. It just so happened that during this time, Kari's sister, Lori was in town visiting. Lori noticed that my glass coffee cups were at the point of no return. Cloudy, etched, scratchy glass that stood between coffee and a perfect morning was a let down, especially when I want to serve our guests like Lori in the morning. Lori is amazing. I might have made the slightest comment about my cups and just a few days later, a package arrives.

It is a box full of my favorite glass cups.

A gift from my dear Lori.

I was giddy.

Now to part two of the equation.

Kari and I spend time together as much as we can. When the weekend allows, we covet time together over morning coffee. We check in with each other, we chat about kids, life, The Cup, her work or whatever. When we can, after work, we sit in our front room, pour some kind of beverage, and pick up where we left off. When we sit in the front room sipping our drink, we use some glassware that is a happy factor for Kari. She likes them, but she doesn't think too much about them. They're fun, they have polka dots on them. She's had them for a while and in order to keep them from fading we wash them by hand. They're cute, they make her happy. It's something that she likes.

Now, mix part one with part two.

So after I unpack my gift from Lori. I am thrilled. I instantly go, take the crappy ones off the shelf, wash and dry the new cups, by hand and place them oh so perfectly onto the shelf.

Ahhh, bliss.

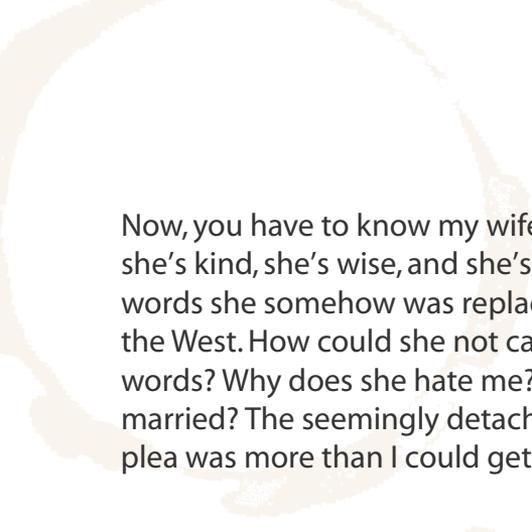
Knowing that I want to keep these cups as clean and crystal clear as possible, I make the comment, the announcement, the proclamation, the edict – *(que epic, swelling theme music)*

***“Good people of the house of Baker:
With these cups, we will now and
forever more, never, nohow, not place
them in any dishwasher – ever,
Amen”.***

So let it be.

Everyone heard the message, right? We discussed this at great length, no? Didn't we have a scheduled family meeting to discuss my glass fetish? Meh, no, but we should have. I am not kidding, the very next day I opened the dishwasher to find one of my precious, my *precious* cups. And in my own Lord of the Rings, Smeagol way, I gasped. *My precious!* Who did this? Water was still sitting inside the base of the cup, staining, etching, eating its way into my cup and into my very soul.

OK, maybe over the top with the drama, but I think you can get the point that I was a little out of sorts, especially after I had just made the request. These are my precious. The question echoed throughout all the land, or so it felt. Kari was there, the kids were there, and the answer was there. *"I don't know who put it in there, it's not a big deal"*. What? But, but, but, I just asked if we could keep these precious, just like your polka dotted ones, is that so hard to do? *"Meh, don't bother, you know they'll get scratched eventually anyway, it's not a big deal"*.



Now, you have to know my wife. She's amazing. She's loving, she's kind, she's wise, and she's beautiful. But with those words she somehow was replaced with the Wicked Witch of the West. How could she not care? How could she utter those words? Why does she hate me? What happened to the girl I married? The seemingly detached emotion to an emotional plea was more than I could get my head around.

The reaction.

At that moment, at that simple, stupid, insignificant moment I was devastated. I could not believe that the care factor simply wasn't there. I was pissed to be blunt. After all of my efforts to preserve polka dot glasses and when it came to my cups there was not even apathy, it was indifference and that was huge. I struggled to wrap my head around something that was so small, yet its emotion carried marital significance. Was this a deal breaker? Hardly. Was Kari some kind of careless man-hater? Not in the least. But yet I continued to come back to that benign exchange that somehow metastasized into something that was capable of eating away at our relationship. The story ended fine. Kari was completely innocent and I've given way to the simple fact of letting go, cups are cups, they can be replaced.

But relationships can't.

But the story to me was so profound. I kept coming back to my accounting of debits and credits and realized the truth. My balance sheet is *my* balance sheet.

Kari's balance sheet is *hers*.

My cups are valuable to my life's balance sheet.

Kari's glasses are valuable to her balance sheet.

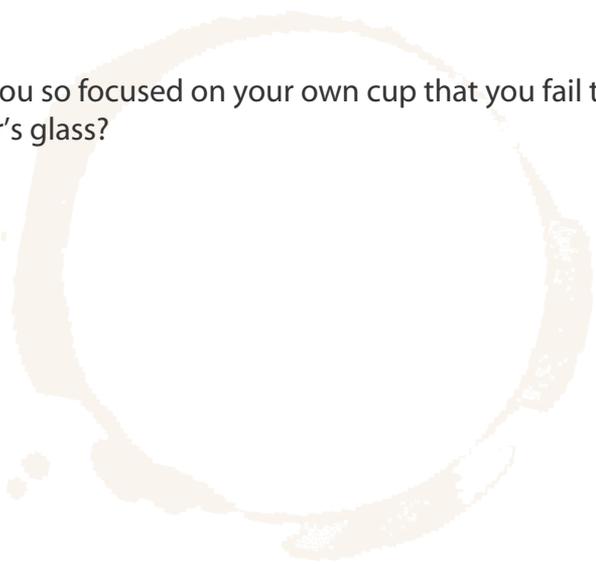
Her innocent comment on my cups signaled to me her balance sheet, my stupid over-reaction signaled to her my balance sheet. Crystal clear cups are valuable to me; non-faded polka dotted glassware is valuable to her.

The point: we're both right and we're both wrong... at the same time.

As oversimplified as this story is, it carries such a lesson for me and I think it can help you in your own relationships. Your cups *are not his glasses*. And his glasses, by very nature *are not your cups*. There are things from the very beginning of our lives that are cups, or glasses to each of us. You have things that matter so very much to you. Your cup may hold your dreams, passions, or goals that are unique to you. Hope for the future, passions, and pursuits may be inside your partner's glass. When we realize that one side is often times very different, yet just as valuable as our side, then there is something beautiful that happens, we yield to the other side.

And when we yield to the other side, it is credited to both, because we both also gave to the other. And, as our story continues, Kari now keeps the cups out of the dishwasher. And I, continue to wash her polka dotted glasses by hand.

It's a beautiful thing.



Are you so focused on your own cup that you fail to see the other's glass?

Have you ever fully appreciated the glass side of the balance sheet? If you haven't then it's no wonder there's a struggle. Too often relationships break and one side has no idea as to just what happened. Shocked, even broadsided when the other side announces they want out. The reason that happens is because one side feels that their glasses were never, ever valued, or even noticed.

A message to you, if you're on the cup side – you're dead wrong if you think that your cups are more important than her glasses. It's simply a difference in what's valued and what's expensed. The more that you take value for your side, it is a principle that the other side is losing, draining, spending and ultimately reaching a bankruptcy in emotion.

If you don't believe it, then why is it that your relationship is dead? If you can't read into the other balance sheet and see that you've been taking and not giving – I'll help you out here, you're still wrong. You, in your own self-centered way of viewing your relationship have missed everything. You may not value the glasses, but the truth is the glasses matter to her, *and that's everything* to her.

How often have you looked into your spouse or your co-worker's eyes and heard what they're saying and simply dismissed it as emotional, a fantasy, or simply stupid?

Or, if you're finding yourself having to read this stupid little book against your will, guess what, you're an ignorant glass, and the cup has been trying to get you to realize the cup is important. You better wise up and humble down – quick.

So, how to change this? How to learn a new language?

Simple. Start honestly by owning the fact that you, like me with my accounting epiphany, realize there is a language that you *don't understand, yet*.

Just because it's not *your* language doesn't mean it's not a language that is critical. Just because I didn't speak accounting did not somehow disqualify accounting as a valuable language. Every accountant on earth would tell me differently. Every successful business would tell me differently, and every successful relationship would tell you differently. You have to start by first telling the other side that you don't know what's valuable to them, and confess that up until this moment, you never appreciated what is valuable to them and that even going forward it's going to be a stretch for you to learn this new appreciation. But, if you avail yourself to doing the work, owning the truth that your side is just one side and not the total account, you can begin to take care of your own cups and glasses.

It's time to learn the other side, again.
Let's chat....

What's meaningful to you?

What's meaningful to him/her?

What's her/his passions? Can you answer that?

Do you even know?

Have you ever asked him/her what is it that makes them feel valued and alive? Is it words that you can say? Is it actions you can perform? Is it an expression of service, or acts of kindness? Have you done them? Did you know these answers long ago and now you've forgotten them?



What to do next:

Go for coffee, or a drink, or lunch...

Take this book, ask these questions, and answer them truthfully. Remember that your cup and his glass are equal in value.

Learn the language. Share the journey.

CUPS vs Glasses

HUNTING
GOLFING
TALKING
SEX
QUIET
KIDS
CAREER
TOUCHING
SEX
SUPER BOWL
SECURITY
MONEY
COMPUTER

SHOPPING
COFFEE TIME
BEING HEARD
TALKING
PARTY
SOLITUDE
KIDS
READING A BOOK
SLEEP
SMALL CAFE
FUN
TOUCHING
SEX :)

Look at both sides, neither is right, neither is wrong.
Both sides have value. Get to a place where you appreciate and
value the other side.

For over 20 years Owen Baker has been helping corporate clients discover their true voice as a brand management consultant. Refining the message and then expressing their voice to the world through corporate and personal identity programs.



Owen's passion for excellence in expressing one's true identity has inspired corporate clients, leaders, teams, as well as couples and individuals.

His platform for influence has been through his work as a consultant, his writings and through The Square Cup, a small coffeehouse located in the rural farming community of Stromsburg, Nebraska.

Corporate, executive and individual clients can reach Owen through his website, www.owendbaker.com and his blog, www.asquarecup.com.

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