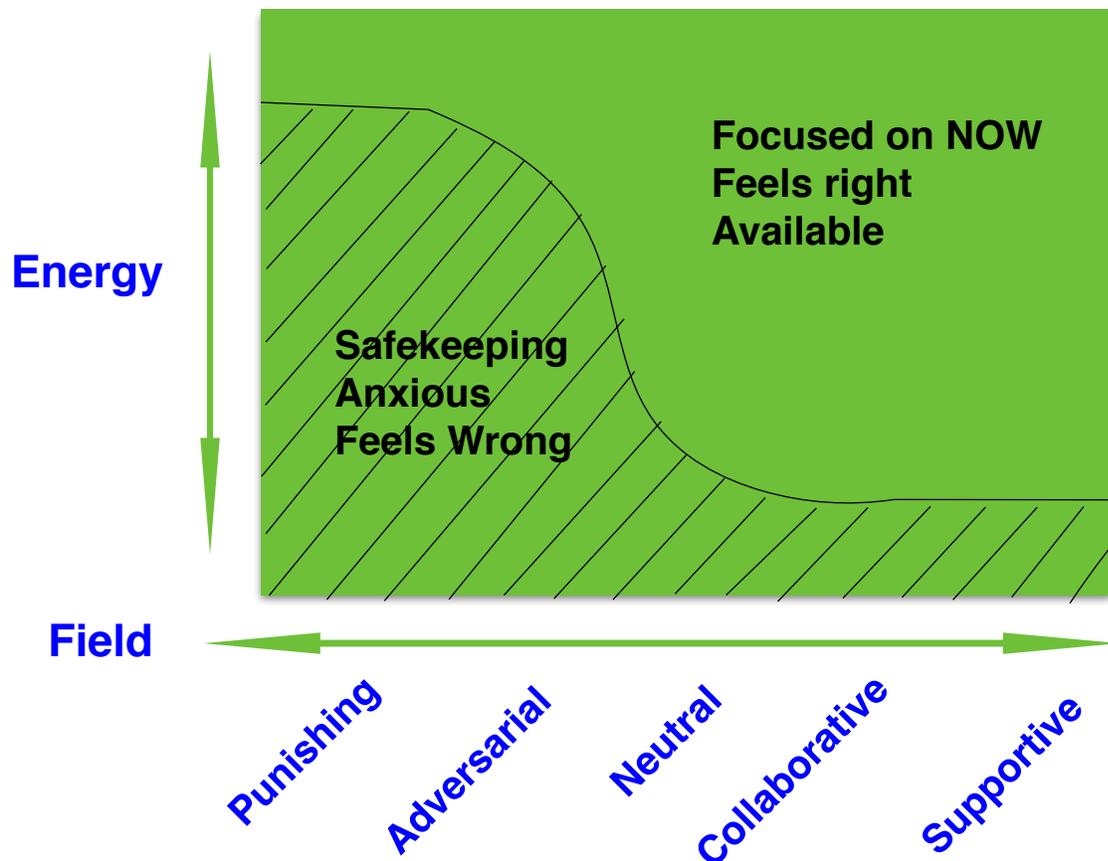




## The Big Picture

The Big Picture is your shorthand to understanding how relationships work. The How To Who Toolkit will take you through many tools and processes that engender effective relationships. But the Big Picture is the overall concept to keep in mind. Even if you were to get nothing else, getting this concept will make a big difference in your relationships.

This graphic depicts **Field & Energy**:



Here's how it works: In any given situation, and at any point in time, there is a certain amount of energy that we have — and by energy I mean physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual — all our kinds of energy. And we use our energy across a spectrum of fields, or situations. **And how our energy gets used determines how effective we can be.**

Look at the bottom row of fields. You can see how they progress from negative to positive. Our energy changes as we move across this spectrum, which we call the field.

Now let's look how this works:

Start on the left, look at the **Punishing** field: When we are in a punishing situation (bad meeting, someone angry with us, feeling like a loser, etc.), most of our energy is used to keep us safe, to defend our self. Safe means protecting our self from feeling any worse. Sometimes our energy is used to save face, to avoid more negativity, to lay low, to reassure our self, to overtly defend. We're anxious because things aren't right. We are wary, on the lookout for any threats.

You know how this field feels. Think back to a punishing meeting that you were in... How were you feeling? Did you start thinking for a reason you could leave the room? Did you shut down and go quiet? Did you look at a trusted colleague to share your discomfort together? Your focus on the content of the meeting was much less because your energy was on safety.

Now move one step right to the **Adversarial** field. Look at how we use our energy in an adversarial situation. Adversarial is characterized by, *“I can do/be better than him. I can get there faster/first. We will beat them. I am better than you.”* Energy remains focused mostly inward. That’s because we have to focus on our self in order to know where we stand with the other guy. We focus on winning, doing better than; we’re still anxious, still wary because we are paying attention to where we stand.

Adversarial may not feel so wrong to us because we spend a lot of our energy in adversarial situations. Often, this is the default field in business. We may be used to it, but we aren’t entirely at ease. We can’t use the full impact of our energy when some of it is directed inward.

Next step is the **Neutral** field. This is the cross over point where our energy is somewhat evenly focused inward and outward. We are at ease, but remain on alert. This is a good field to be in on a sales call, for example. You’re at ease because you know your business and you know sales; at the same time, you’re alert to the reactions of people around you.

Now look at the **Collaboration** field: In collaboration, our attitude is, *“I help you; you help me and together we both succeed.”* When we collaborate, we focus on what’s happening now, more of our energy is available to work together. It feels right. It’s comfortable so a lot less energy stays in safekeeping. I can use my energy to focus on you and our work. Things

flow freely because there is so much less need to keep safe. We are open to each other's ideas. We move forward together.

Next is the **Supportive** field: Supportive is characterized by, *"I'll help you."* When we support another person we use even more of our energy to focus on the now. Our energy is available to this moment; it feels so right. Our focus is outward, on the needs of the other person. There is less need to keep our self safe, less need to defend.

Barbara Fredrickson at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has done some fascinating research on the power of positive emotions. Her work shows that positive emotions actually expand our ability to learn and understand, as well as expanding our behavioral tendencies. Negative emotions actually shrink our ability to think and decrease our range of behavioral options. She says, *"Even though a positive emotional state is only momentary, the benefits last in the form of traits, social bonds, and abilities that endure into the future."* This is the essence of building relationships.

Notice that in both ends of the field spectrum, part of our energy always remains focused on safekeeping and part remains focused on now. The human mind never stops its safekeeping work. We are wired to be alert to threats — it's "fight or flight" at work. As a result, we never stop being aware of now.

What's important about this is that when we're most defensive, much less of our energy is available. We don't think or act as effectively as we normally would. When we're least defensive, more of our energy is available.

*As defensiveness increases, effectiveness decreases.*

### **The Key Question: Who controls the field?**

The field of energy is shared by everyone present. No one person can control it. Each person has an impact on the field. Every person present contributes to the field, even if they aren't talking, even if they are sitting quietly. Sure, one person can make a harsh or negative remark that causes people to take a sharp breath and move towards safekeeping. But each person will respond to this harshness a little differently. Some people will shift hard left unto defensiveness, others may move to a more neutral energy, while others may not move at all. Each person is different, so each person reacts differently. Consequently, no one person is in charge of the field.

Of course, there are situations where someone (usually an authority) is threatening enough to cause everyone to move to safekeeping. You sure know it when you're in it. This degree of danger is not the norm for most interactions.

## Here's the Take Away:

**Good communicators try to avoid actions that cause other people to feel defensive.** In this way, more of their message gets through because more of the other person is available to hear it.

Think about this: What does it serve to verbally 'attack' someone by repeatedly asking them, "*why?, why?, why?*" What good is it to put someone down? To make them feel like you won and they lost? To make them feel like they aren't as smart or as good or as talented or as strong? To try to BS them? These actions bind up a person's energy, put them on the defensive. So less of him is available to understand you.

Ironically, when we put someone on the defensive, we ourselves need to be more alert — after all, when we cause defensiveness, that person might attack back. So we end up having to be wary of a counterattack, i.e., we ourselves end up being defensive. [Picture two people feeling defensive — how effective can they be?]

There's another irony here, too: When we actively put someone down, we sometimes get a little boost in the feeling that we are better than they are. "*I'm right. I won. I'm more powerful. I'm smarter. My way is best.*" Here's the irony: Overpowering someone else is usually our effort to make us feel good about ourselves. We may feel stronger in the moment, but that little victory can often end up feeling hollow because we sense that the other

person is not on board with us. And of course, when we're trying to build a relationship, we need the other person on board with us.

Now think about the good it does to support someone to help them bring out their best? To share positivity with them? To be honest and forthcoming? To be authentic? To listen with genuine care? To strive to understand their point of view?

When we ourselves are positive, non-attacking, and non-defensive, we contribute to making the field a little more safe. So others can relax and be less defensive. Guess what!?! More energy is available to be effective. We each can think and behave better. Cool, eh?

Which kind of person would you rather be with? Which kind of person do you want to work with? Who do you want to do business with?

Which kind of person would you rather be? It is your decision.

#### **4 Lessons from The Big Picture:**

1. Understand that our behavior only contributes to the total field.  
Together the group governs the field; no one person is in control, yet one person can have great impact.
2. Defensiveness interferes with productivity and effectiveness.
3. Defensiveness interferes with our ability to listen and understand.
4. Our best strategy in all relationships is to purposefully contribute to a positive field.