

A LONGER NOTE FOR THE CURIOUS

The background, training, and thinking behind the work

*Where I come from, how I came to do this, and the
framework I've built my practice around.*

Gideon Hanekom

Counsellor · Ceres, Western Cape

THE RELATIONSHIP GUY

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How I got here

I started in theology, then trained as a counsellor, then went back to formal psychology. Three disciplines, two countries, more than two decades. This is the short version of how the thread runs.

I went to Stellenbosch University straight out of school, in 1998, and spent the next six years there. A four-year Bachelor of Theology, then a Master of Divinity *cum laude*, then a final Licentiate in Theology that prepared me for ordained ministry. I was nineteen when I started and twenty-five when I finished.

Even then, what drew me wasn't the doctrine. It was the people. What I loved most about ministry was sitting with people in real difficulty. The kind of conversations where someone's marriage is breaking, or their grief is fresh, or they don't know how to keep going. The theological training mattered, but the part that lived in me was the pastoral part. Being with people. Trying to be useful in the hardest moments of their lives.

I served in ministry for several years after that, and then in 2008 my wife and I emigrated to New Zealand.

It was in New Zealand that two things happened that shaped what I do now.

The first is that I came across the work of Tony Robbins and the Robbins-Madanes Training Institute. I worked through their human needs material informally, on the side, without completing formal coaching certification. The framework stuck with me. It was the first time I'd seen something that named, simply and clearly, *what actually drives people*. It became part of how I saw the people I was sitting with, and how I saw myself.

The second is that I decided to train formally as a counsellor. I enrolled at the New Zealand Institute of Professional Counselling and completed their Diploma of Professional Counselling between 2010 and 2013, including over two hundred hours of supervised counselling practice. That's the part of my training that turned theory into craft. Sitting with real people, in real difficulty, week after week, under supervision, with someone watching what I did and helping me get better at it.

After that I worked as a counsellor for over a decade in New Zealand.

In 2018, I left ministry. My spiritual journey had evolved, and I felt that what I had to offer was the counselling work, not the religious framing it had started inside. That was a quiet, difficult transition, and one that I think made me better at what I do. The people who come to see me come from all walks of life, all backgrounds, and all relationships with faith or no faith. The work needs to meet them where they are.

A couple of years later, in 2020, I went back to formal study. I enrolled at Massey University and completed a Graduate Diploma in Arts in Psychology in 2022, followed by a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts with Distinction in Psychology in 2023. I wanted the deeper psychology grounding underneath the practitioner training. The course list ran from social psychology, abnormal and therapeutic psychology, and assessment of individual differences, through to organisational psychology, health psychology, and understanding mental distress.

In 2023, my family and I returned to South Africa.

We settled in Ceres, in the Western Cape, where I work now. I'm currently focused on three things: building my counselling practice here, returning to Xhosa (which I formally studied for three years as a young man at Stellenbosch and which matters again now), and growing the writing and online work that lets me reach people beyond this valley.

What I've come to believe about this work

A few things I've come to believe, after all of this.

Most relationship problems aren't actually about what they look like

They're about underlying needs that aren't being met, or aren't being met in the way the person needs them. Once you can see that clearly, things that felt confusing start making sense.

People don't usually need more talking. They need a better map

What changes a relationship is not endless processing. It's seeing accurately, naming what's happening, and choosing differently. The framework I work with is the map I've found most useful, both for me and for the people I sit with.

The goal is not for your partner to become more like you

It's to learn how to love the partner you actually have, well. That's a harder discipline than most people realise, and it's the work that changes things.

Counselling should have a direction

I don't believe in open-ended sessions that drift on for years. Every conversation should be going somewhere. If we're not moving, we should know why.

My job is not to tell you what to do

It's to help you see what you couldn't see on your own, and to give you something practical to take from it.

How the framework fits with how I work

A note for the curious about how the Six Needs Framework sits alongside the rest of my training.

As a practitioner, I work primarily from a **cognitive behavioural** and **solution-focused brief therapy** orientation. Both are present-focused, change-oriented, and built around the idea that insight on its own doesn't shift much. What changes a relationship or a life is doing something differently, consistently, in a direction that makes sense.

The theoretical traditions I align with sit a layer deeper than that. They're the ones that take needs, emotions, and attachment seriously as the drivers of how people think, feel, and act. Maslow's broader work on human motivation. Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, which makes the case that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are core to wellbeing. Attachment theory in its modern form, which explains why we reach the way we do for the people we love. Emotion-focused thinking, particularly Sue Johnson's work, which traces how relational pain works underneath the visible conflict.

The Six Needs Framework I use sits between these two layers. It's a mid-level map. Accessible enough to use at a kitchen table, theoretically grounded enough to hold up under serious examination. It draws on the older needs tradition, the attachment lineage, and the emotion-focused work, and pulls them into a single framework that a couple can actually understand and use.

The combination, with the needs framework as the map and behavioural and solution-focused methods as the engine, is what allows the work to be both deep and practical.

We work out what's actually driving things at the needs level, and then we work out what you're going to do about it this week.

That's the way I've come to think about it. Whether that interests you or not, the work itself looks the same: a clear framework, a direction, and honest conversation.

About the Six Needs Framework

The framework I use isn't entirely mine. The original six-needs structure comes from Tony Robbins and the work that developed at the Robbins-Madanes Training Institute, which I encountered informally in the early 2010s and which became part of how I think about people.

What I've done in the years since is develop it for the work I actually do. I've extended it with attachment theory, drawn on John Gottman's research on couples, on Esther Perel's thinking on desire, and on the broader needs tradition described above. The result is a framework that's genuinely useful in a counselling room while staying honest to the psychology underneath it.

If you'd like to see how this works for you, the **Six Needs Lens** assessment on the site is a good place to start. It maps your own profile across the six needs and gives you a detailed reading of what that means for you and your relationship.

Training and qualifications

For the kind of reader who wants to see this on the page.

Theology · Stellenbosch University

- Bachelor of Theology (BTh), 2001
- Master of Divinity (MDiv, Ministry), *cum laude*, 2002
- Licentiate in Theology (LicTheol), 2003

Counselling · New Zealand Institute of Professional Counselling

- Diploma of Professional Counselling, 2010-2013
- 200+ hours of supervised counselling practice and 20+ hours of professional supervision

Psychology · Massey University, New Zealand

- Graduate Diploma in Arts (Psychology), 2022
- Postgraduate Diploma in Arts, with Distinction in Psychology, 2023

Additional influence

- Robbins-Madanes Training Institute coaching material (informal, early 2010s). The original source of the human needs framework that underpins my work.

Practice locations

- In person: Ceres, Western Cape, South Africa
- Online: globally

Outside the work

I've been married for over twenty years.

That marriage has been through most of what a long marriage goes through. Two international moves. Raising two children. Financial pressure. Loss. The slow ordinary work of staying close to another person while you both keep changing. I won't pretend it's been easy, and I won't pretend I've always got it right. But I've lived in this material, not just studied it, and that shapes how I sit with the couples I work with.

I'm a father of two teenagers, and parenting has taught me more about my own patterns than any training ever did.

I'm in my late forties. Past the age of trying to impress anyone, hopefully old enough to know what I actually know and what I don't. I love a good conversation, the Karoo, slow mornings, and the kind of writing that doesn't waste your time.

Thank you for reading. If you'd like to see the framework in action for you, the **Six Needs Lens** is on the site.

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