

Living Out the Dreams of your Wedding Day

Communication Challenges

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“I didn’t mean for him to feel criticized or nagged”. This constant observation of women I see in my counseling and life coaching practices is a cry of frustration which surprises the wife and leaves the husband deject and feeling disrespected. You may not have intended to criticize but regardless of your intent, that is precisely what he heard. How often with those closest to us do we feel mis-understood?

Dr. Emerson Eggerichs observes in his book Love and Respect that men and women can use the same words but communicate different things. He observes that men speak and receive communication through a blue lens while women speak and hear through a pink lens. For example, I might say “I don’t want to talk about it so just drop it!” Do we really mean we don’t want to discuss it anymore or are we hoping he will want me to share the feelings of my heart. Chances are, he is going to receive your communication literally and then be surprised when you tell him he doesn’t respond appropriately to your requests. Men and women can use the same words and mean different things. Emerson’s point is that we are hard wired differently; not better or worse, just different.

What are some practical solutions to communicate more effectively so that we complete the communication link (receiver hears the intent of what I am saying) successfully?

Gary Smalley, a nationally known marriage counselor and author of renown observes that women have a “built in marriage manual”; meaning that living out a good marriage is natural for them. Living it out is one thing but Smalley notes that effectively communicating the manual to the spouse is often times out of their pay grade. In general, our husbands are right brain dominated thinkers. This means they tend to speak and receive words concretely or what they would describe as literally. Husbands appreciate it if we describe an issue as a “10” on the scale of importance or we explain “this is not a pebble, it is of boulder sized significance” and he knows to pay attention. This is a de-coding

mechanism to for you to speak in blue and for him to receive in pink.

I've spoken to many women who start a conversation with their husbands while he is engrossed in another activity of high interest to him (sports on TV, reading the paper or walking as if on mission). A helpful way to approach him is two fold – let him know how much time you need to either ask for his advice or to otherwise engage him in communication (hint: tell him if you want advice or for him to just listen. His default mode is to fix it). After giving him the parameters, then give him a choice about when you can engage him in the conversation. He will appreciate the fact that you notice that he is otherwise engaged (it feels like respect to him) and you will be less inclined to be offended that he never listens to you or that you are always of less importance than his other life activities.

Husbands feel respected and connected to us when we share “side by side” activities. I know from my own experience how hard it is to sit with Patrick when I have a million other household responsibilities on my (often self imposed) “to do” list. However Patrick (my husband) is honored by my willingness to be near him; with or without conversation. Even with little or no words, our husbands receive your presence as communicating love, respect and friendship. Try it and see what happens. We need to be purposeful and intentional about these things.

Some couples who are just “too busy” in their season of life may want to be purposeful in scheduling talk time with your husband. Noted author Gary Ezzo refers to this as “couch time”; the idea being that we regularly schedule 15 minutes of uninterrupted time to emotionally connect with our spouse and enter into one another's world. Your children will soon discover that this time is “protected time” that mommy and daddy give to one another as a gift and the gift does not include (non-emergency) interruptions. The children will benefit from the joy and peace which results from this regular connection as you model the picture of an invested marriage. One of the greatest gifts you can provide your children is peace and security in the home.

My challenge this week is to encourage you to try something new to invest in your marriage as you try one or all of these suggestions and receive the benefit from the enhanced relationship with your husband.

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