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It's Not What You Say, but to Whom You are Speaking!



By Monica Wofford, CSP



Do you remember the old Lily Tomlin comedy bit in which she portrayed a switch board operator and said "Is this the person to whom I am speaking?" Have you ever had that thought when talking with the opposite sex?

It's almost one of these: "Hello, are you in there?" It might resemble the kind of feeling Billy Crystal had when he said "Hellooooo" in City Slickers, coupled with the desire to use a CB radio where at least you can expect a "10-4" or some other primitive acknowledgement. You get it. You've likely been there and you also see some of the stereotypes. There is simply no denying that men and women communicate differently. However, what continues to baffle me is how we can all know this intellectually, yet still expect a man to quickly articulate an eloquent answer when asked "What'cha thinking?" Haven't we learned by now that there's high likelihood the answer is "nothing" and that's perfectly okay?

So, if we do it so differently, communicate that is, then how do we do it successfully or even effectively? Chances are you've struggled with how and these tips might help.

KEEP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR

Just because we speak differently and think differently, which both drive communication, doesn't mean that it always has to be so incredibly serious. Every conversation is not for the purpose of solving world hunger. Does it really matter that he chose not to hear you say "Honey, can you please put your underwear in the dirty clothes hamper?" Or is it truly fascinating that he seems not to realize they're even on the floor and that the hamper doesn't really exist to hold clothes, but is rather as a decorative piece?

APPRECIATE MORE THAN YOU CRITICIZE

Maybe he brings home the bacon and tries to do all you ask, but misses the mark more than you'd like in how he talks or listens. Maybe he hears you when you want to talk and hugs you when you're sad and maybe sometimes he would prefer to listen to the noise of Sport

Center over your sharing the intimate details of a girlfriend's problems for the third time? Either way, how much time do you spend pointing out and appreciating when he does it "right"? How much time do you spend filling his emotional bank account when he does listen just as you'd like? The more you appreciate and the less you criticize, the more likely you are to find more to appreciate. Focus on appreciating his style more. Communicate your appreciation more than you complain. No one likes to be told they're doing it wrong all the time.



DON'T CONFUSE DIFFERENT WITH DIFFICULT

A different style of communication is not the same as a difficult style. Everyone communicates differently and chances are, if you do what most do, you've chosen to be attracted to an opposite. Thus, your communication style is going to be opposite of his style. That doesn't make it difficult. That makes it different, period.

Choose to be fascinated by the differences and challenge yourself to see it this way, versus being frustrated by the difficulties. Fascination makes you curious and might even make you smile. Frustration makes you, and actually both of you, frustrated and usually unhappy. Unhappy people who are communicating under stress aren't likely to say things nicely, clearly, or without the regalia of negative emotions that come out under stressful frustrating times.

PICK YOUR CONVERSATIONS

We've all heard the phrase pick your battles, but why does it have to be a battle? That's like setting it up to be difficult before we even give ourselves a fighting chance. Who said each communication interaction or conversation had to be a battle? What if you just pick those



conversations in which you will stick to your guns or insist on being heard or making your point? With a mindset that sometimes you'll be right, sometimes you'll be heard and sometimes you may not be right, but rather just successful you might just find yourself faced with more opportunities to appreciate his style. Let him win a few and pick those times, too. After all, there's a reason you like communicat-



ing with him, isn't there? Why not appreciate the way he does it more often? Pick those times more so than you choose to pick a battle.

Communication is a like a dance and when you are always insisting that you lead, eventually you will train the initiative and creativity right out of someone, regardless of whether they are a friend, boss, or mate. They'll simply stop trying to lead. They'll stop trying out new "steps" in the dance and they'll give up and just follow or they'll resist you every step of the way. Instead, partner with your partner in making time for both of you to get your point across, lead a conversation periodically, and simply follow at other times. Communication that is a two-way street promotes understanding. Communication that is only one sided is more like a dictatorship and if this is your partner, partnership might be the better plan.

About the Author

Monica Wofford, CSP is the CEO of Contagious Companies, Inc, an Orlando based training and consulting firm. Her more than 20 years of leadership experience makes her a highly sought after coach, consultant, speaker and trainer in both Corporate America and the Healthcare and Retail industries. To learn more about Monica and her training, speaking, or coaching services, or to contact her directly, go to www.monicawofford.com or www.contagiouscompanies.com or call 1-866-382-0121.