

RECOGNIZE THAT THE METHOD YOU USE TO MOTIVATE YOUR SPOUSE COULD BE HAVING THE OPPOSITE EFFECT YOU INTEND, EVEN THOUGH YOU HAVE GOODWILL.

Are You Negative During Conflict to Motivate Your Spouse to Be Positive?

I discovered something. I found that within our nature as husbands and wives we have a default reaction based on our maleness and femaleness.

A Husband's Default Mode

When a husband feels disrespected, his default mode is to "naturally" react in ways that feel unloving to his wife. Is this why God commands a husband to love, to counter this proclivity (Ephesians 5:33; Colossians 3:19)? Though he is not always conscious of this disposition, she is! For example, 85 percent of husbands withdraw and stonewall during marital conflict. To a wife that feels like an act of hostility whereas to him it feels like the right and honorable thing to do to prevent things from escalating out of control. From his vantage point, he doesn't see his reaction as unloving but more a reaction to her disrespect. This explains why he doesn't apologize though his wife stands in front of him fully expecting him to apologize.

Does a Husband Ever See His Lack of Love?

Yes, many times he sees it but he uses his negative reaction to motivate her to change, to become more positive! So, get this. He withholds love to teach her to be more respectful. He withdraws and stonewalls to send the message, "Stop treating me disrespectfully." He isn't trying to be mean-spirited or unloving but is defensively reacting to what he feels is offensive behavior on her part. In his heart, he feels de-energized and deflated when she disses him. He knows at one level this isn't her goal, but it feels like this since no one talks to him the way she does. He wonders, "Is she just using this topic as an opportunity to send me a message that she doesn't like who I am as a human being?" Unfortunately, when a man verbalizes his feelings about needing respect, a wife is apt to say, "Well, you don't deserve my respect, and besides this is narcissistic." From then on he remains even quieter. When the culture labels these male sentiments as narcissistic (which it could be, in the same way a woman might be a prima donna for wanting love and attention) and the wife uses this profile, it shuts men down. Because men do not have a voice and vocabulary to humbly defend their deepest need, their only recourse is silent anger. He now withholds love with the hope that she'll awaken to his need for respect and her disrespectful attitudes; of course this doesn't work.

A Husband's Unloving Reaction Does Not Motivate a Wife's Respect!

In my book *Love & Respect*, I explain how to spell love to a wife. I created an acronym, C.O.U.P.L.E. A wife needs closeness, openness, understanding, peacemaking, loyalty, and esteem. When she receives these, she feels loved.

As I discussed C.O.U.P.L.E. with one husband in my office, he put his head down on my table in deep sorrow. He said to me, "I did the opposite of every one of these to teach my wife to respect me. I decided not to love her in those ways you mentioned until she started showing me more respect. After being mistreated for months on end, she left me." I shared with him, "You cannot deprive your wife of her need for love as a way of motivating her to meet your need for respect."

A Wife's Default Mode

When a wife feels unloved, her default mode is to "naturally" react in ways that feel disrespectful to her husband. Is this why God commands a wife to put on a respectful demeanor, to counter this bent (Ephesians 5:33; 1 Peter 3:1–2)? Though she is not always conscious of this temperament, he is! For example, most wives complain and criticize during marital conflict. To a husband ongoing criticism feels like disrespect for who he is as a person, whereas to her it feels like the right and loving thing to do in order to reconcile and bring the relationship up-to-date. From her vantage point, she doesn't intend to be disrespectful per se but is hurting over her husband's failure to be loving and sensitive. She sees his lack of love, not her disrespect.

Does a Wife Ever See Her Disrespect?

Yes, a wife detects her disrespect but comments later on, "He should know I really didn't mean it. I was trying to get him to understand how he hurt me so he'd apologize and we could re-connect." She turns negative to motivate him to be positive! She is disrespectful to get love. She complains and criticizes in ways that though carried along by a spirit of disdain, she hopes that her "look" of disgust will awaken him to his failure to love her as he ought. She feels this should be obvious to her husband until her son marries a woman who treats him in the same disrespectful way and then this mother realizes this isn't obvious to her son, nor to her husband. Even so, to her credit she isn't trying to be mean-spirited but is defensively reacting to what feels offensive to her. She feels insecure and needs reassurance that he loves her, and an apology from him would do her soul wonders. To her this isn't rocket science so his refusal to say, "I am sorry" reinforces to her that he really doesn't care about her like she cares about him. She is quick to say "I'm sorry" but he rarely expresses, "I'm sorry" and if he does it's to get her off his back, not because he intends to change. Let me add, she views being respectful as being "nice" and being "nice" doesn't work, so her weapon of choice is contempt, which she doesn't want to choose but she feels she has no other

recourse. Besides, her disrespect gets his attention, despite the fact that it never achieves long term what she hopes.

A Wife's Disrespectful Reaction Doesn't Motivate a Husband's Love!

A wife says, "I would go on communication overkill. I tried and tried to get him to talk to me about what he was feeling. . . . But often he saw our discussions as 'arguments' and he got tired of having to work so hard to 'get along' in our marriage. On top of everything . . . when I get the slightest bit emotional, my voice goes up ten decibels. . . . And, he absolutely cannot stand it when my voice gets loud. So, every time we had a discussion, he would retreat from me which made me work even harder to communicate and pull him back into the conversation. A useless cycle, for certain. . . . How could I be so blind, better yet, how could I be so deaf to what had been going on? I realized that I had been treating my husband disrespectfully. Thinking back on my actions and words, I could 'feel' the disrespect signals I was sending my husband. I was so caught up in my search for unconditional love and validation, and I was blind to what I was doing."

This Raises a Question

How effective is it to be unloving and disrespectful as a way of motivating your spouse to show you respect and love? Long term it is unproductive to be negative to stimulate your spouse to be positive. This MO or method of operating is misguided. Your spouse will feel de-energized and defeated, if not bullied.

Though your goal is to get them to love and respect you, you are depriving your spouse of the love and respect they need to be motivated to meet your need. This modus operandi falls short because it does not touch the heart of your spouse any more than your heart turns positive on the heels of your spouse's negative reactions to you. What is good for the goose is good for the gander.

Though you expect your spouse to decode your intent—that you are negative for a good reason—it is a rare person who softens and turns pleasant when treated in a way that appears harsh and contemptuous. Though you never intend to be mean spirited, your spouse will inevitably struggle to trust your goodwill.

What If a Spouse Is Undeserving of Love and Respect?

What if your spouse deserves the negative reaction due to their bad actions? Your spouse deserves to hear the truth about their bad actions spoken in love and respect toward their spirit. You must separate their fleshy actions from their inner person. In other words, confront their wrongdoing without appearing hostile and contemptuous toward their heart. Hate the sin. Love the sinner.

Truth carries its own weight. Why be right but wrong at the top of your voice? The key is for you to display an unconditional positive regard toward their spirit while addressing their hurtful and offensive conduct. We will address in another email the importance of showing unconditional positive regard toward your spouse's spirit while confronting behaviors that injure the marriage. This is not easy but is necessary. This is crucial since the default mode during marital conflict is to show negative regard toward the spirit of the other person. When hurt, it is within our nature to be unloving and disrespectful in our reactions, not loving and respectful as our first impulse.

Winning Another's Heart

Remember, when you display a hateful and uncivil spirit toward the spirit of your spouse, you will not win their heart even though what you say is true. You will not influence them to face themselves. They will close off their spirit to you out of fear, arrogance, resentment, and shame. They will not feel fond feelings of affection and admiration for you. Your negative reactions are imprudent and impractical means of motivating your spouse to respond more positively to you. Though you feel they are unfriendly and insulting, having violated you and the marriage in the first place, you will not help move the marriage forward by fighting fire with fire—not long term. You know in your heart that you cannot advance the relationship through a malicious and mocking demeanor. You cannot motivate your spouse to be good by you being bad, no matter how bad they have been. The pot would be calling the kettle black.

Do It Differently!

Is it time to do something different? If your default mode is to react in negative, unloving, and disrespectful ways, is it time to do what works?

Listen to this husband's testimony. "We were in the middle of one of our fights. . . . Fed up, I turned and went into my computer room. I left her screaming in the kitchen. I sat down at the computer but as I did so, my spirit said, 'If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten.' That is a big time saying in Alcoholics Anonymous. So I got up and went back into the kitchen. I stood in front of my wife with my arms folded. I realized that posture was wrong. I unfolded my arms and put them down by my side which was hard to do. I then softly said, 'Go ahead, I'm listening.' She began to talk again. Suddenly she said, 'You're not very comfortable are you?' I said, 'No but if we don't try something different nothing will ever change!' She began to cry and the fight was over."

Today's Question: Do you find it in your nature to react in unloving and disrespectful ways in order to motivate your spouse to show you more respect and love? How is that working for you?

Today's Action: I will guard against my default mode! As a wife I will watch over my tendency to be disrespectful. As a husband I will police against my disposition to react in unloving ways. Furthermore, I will not be negative to motivate my spouse to be positive. As a wife, I will not be disrespectful to motivate my husband to love me. As a husband, I will not be unloving to motivate my wife to respect me. I will have a positive regard toward the spirit of my spouse while addressing the negative behaviors in the marriage.

With Love and Respect

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