

Your Gift: “3 Keys” You Need for a Stronger, Happier Marriage!



Key #1 – Don't Assume!

One night my husband and I were driving down a highway in the country with him in the driver's seat. (Yeah, I know the picture shows the woman in the driver's seat, and it is not night time. But I already had this funny picture!)

We were having a pleasant conversation when I abruptly said, "Deer!...Deer!" to which my husband responded, "What? What dear?"

Funny how a little thing like a language barrier and the way a word is spelled almost caused us to hit a deer that was meandering across the road, but fortunately we avoided colliding with the wild animal!

Was the problem in this story my communication skills or my husband's interpretation?



(Pretend there is a full blank page here while you think about your answer. At first I thought my husband's interpretation was the problem. Hmm...that is just human nature! We tend to blame someone or something else for our troubles.)

It certainly could have been both. If I would have said, "Watch out, there is a deer on the road!" my husband would have received the message much more clearly.

On the other hand, if he would have remembered immediately my father's warning to watch out for deer on the road, he would have thought 'deer' instead of 'dear.'

So, key #1 is to not assume you know what someone is telling you by their words or their actions. As smart as the human species is, our brains are often guilty of misinterpretation.

When we look at a vegetable or flower garden, we learn quickly that the plants need adequate light, water, fertilizer and weeding or they may not thrive or even survive.

When we don't train our brains to look for the positive in a situation, they are likely to interpret an event or situation to the default of a negative interpretation.

For example, if my husband comes into the kitchen after I am done cooking pancakes and scrapes the pancake batter bowl with the spatula, how do I interpret that?

Well, I could think he was feeling like I'm wasteful and don't do things quite right when making pancakes. Or, I could think he was being helpful and remember that he is quite frugal and was just trying to salvage the last small pancake!

There are many principles that can be taught from this idea of misinterpretation. But since this is a report and not a novel, I will choose to focus on how we can CLARIFY what our spouse is saying or doing.

Here are some tips to help you with Key #1 – Don't Assume!

1. When speaking with your spouse, listen completely by looking them in the eye and minimize distractions like turning away from a computer, putting a phone down and not thinking what you will say next. This will minimize the chance that later you will think or say, "You didn't say THAT!"
2. Watch and study your spouse's body language. Google for information on what body language can mean. In a quick search myself, I just found that "some studies show more communication is nonverbal (i.e. body language and tone of voice) than verbal (meaning the words used)." Studies disagree on the exact numbers, and as you study about this remember: not all interpretation applies to everyone! Your spouse may have body language with meaning unique to them, so it's more important to learn that by clarifying why they are saying or acting as they do. This brings us to tip #3.
3. Learn to ask for clarification. Here are some questions to help with this.
 - a – What I hear you saying is...Am I correct?
 - b – Do you mean...?
 - c – I'm not sure I understand. Explain more to me what you mean.
(This last one is not a question. It's a statement, of course, for clarification.)
 - d – From your body language I think you aren't feeling excited or want to...Is my interpretation correct?

Once again, CLARIFY your spouse's communication to you. Don't assume you know what they are thinking, feeling or even speaking. You may need some help to clarify a situation from your spouse's perspective.

ASSUMING causes tension and spreads lies that corrode a relationship. When in doubt, check it out!

Key #2 – Finding the Good in Your Spouse

Have you ever had a time in your life when you felt left out or picked on? I remember being in elementary school when it was time to pick teams for dodge ball. It wasn't really my favorite game, but I thought I wasn't horrible at it. Imagine the sorrow I felt when the team captains would pick their teammates and I was chosen second to last or even last!

It sure makes a young child feel inadequate, broken or not good enough in some way when other children seem to rank your athletic abilities at rock bottom. Perhaps they just didn't like me for some other reason or they just didn't know me that well and chose friends they were comfortable with first. Regardless of their intent, I had my own perception of what they thought about me.



From the time we are born into this world, some of our most basic needs are to belong and be loved, to be part of something bigger than us. Most babies are tenderly cared for and all their needs are met by doting parents. Then we start to grow up and face the challenges of life head on.

Not everyone cares that our needs are met. Not everyone is nice, intentionally or

unintentionally, and not everyone plays by the rules.

When we are feeling distanced from, hurt or even neglected by our spouse or another loved one because of their negative actions – or lack of action – we can think of them when they were a small baby. Take a moment to picture them as a helpless creature needing care and compassion. What hurts may be causing them to cry and act the way they do at times?

Imagine them as an infant so small and shrink them even smaller in your mind. Shrink them to an inch or even a half an inch in size – small enough for you to gently pick them up and place them in a special place in your heart where you give them warmth and love, where they can be safe. Don't get weirded out by this way of thinking. We all want to receive the energy of love, light and kindness and hear words of comfort and cheer.

Now, your spouse is not a baby, of course, but if you can conjure up that feeling in your heart that you are indeed a protector of sorts for them or in biblical terms "brother's keeper," you will want to try harder to understand their perspective and work at building them up, not tearing them down. When we send out compassion to those who have hurt

us in some way, although not guaranteed, it is one way to receive more love from others even if it's not that person. What we send out tends to come back to us.

When my friend's marriage relationship was struggling, she started a simple habit of writing down one thing a day that she was grateful for about her husband. It was hard at first because she had noticed everything there was to complain about in her husband's daily actions. Her focus had been on his weaknesses.

By switching her focus to see the good in him, her feelings and energy towards him changed. At first, it was silly to write, "He did the dishes tonight" because that was the only good she could see in him all day. However, as time went on, she could see he actually was more loving and helpful than she realized.



Over time, she was able to start verbalizing her gratitude for the things he did to help and serve each day or for his skills and talents. Their stressed marriage started to change bit by bit, and this one little trick was the start of great positive change for them. This one simple way to love your spouse is all about YOU taking a minute or two each day to praise and honor your spouse or other loved one rather than criticize and complain. Give it a try and see what it does to create more bliss and love in your relationships!

[Key #3 – On the Next Page](#)

Key #3 – Practice Sufficient Self Care

When my second baby was born 15 months after my first child, I remember feeling overwhelmed at the thought of taking care of two little ones in diapers. How was I ever going to meet the needs of a one-year-old and a newborn at the same time, both wearing diapers and needing food and loving attention?

My mother-in-law gave me some great advice. She said I would learn to attend to the needs of my children based on what was most urgent.

This reminds me of a battlefield scene where injured men are taken to the medics. There is a hierarchy when attending to the needs of the injured, of course. Those soldiers with the most life-threatening wounds are cared for first.

In family relationships there is often a hierarchy of needs as well, and with all the responsibilities that come with raising a family, it can be overwhelming. We desire to take care of our spouse's and children's needs but sometimes neglect our own. Unless we take time for our own needs and recuperating from many daily duties, we might get burned out quickly and be as effective as a candle being snuffed out when thrown into water.

Have you ever had a day when you were so busy with this and that, and when lunchtime rolled around you realized you hadn't had breakfast? Or, for those over 50, been too busy to color your hair so your grandchild says, "Why do you have white hairs coming on your head?" (Of course, maybe you like your changing hair color and that's great!)

I'm one of those people who likes to eat 5 to 6 small meals a day because it keeps my energy up, keeps my blood sugars level, and helps me not be so grouchy with others or stressed during a trying moment. Well, today it was morning snack time, but I was ready to work on the computer.

Am I the only one in the world who has sensitive technology? My computer has to be unplugged and reset once or twice before it will boot up, usually only once. I've also noticed if it's too cold in the winter from the heat being turned down at night that my computer might not turn on, you know, just rebelling at the cooler temperatures.

As I prepared my yummy snack of leftover turkey, cranberry sauce and a homemade roll, I tried to turn that computer on. After two tries I gave up and decided my angels were telling me to **relax and enjoy** that morning snack without having work on my mind.

A big part of self-care is taking breaks both physically and mentally. Although I do enjoy my online work, sometimes I need a brain break. And sometimes I need food for my body and even food for my soul!

And what does this have to do with relationships? When you take time to nourish your body, exercise, take a nap, etc. you have more vitality and happy chemicals running through your body. You will be more cheerful and have the mental and physical energy to serve others, especially your spouse.



In order to light the way, self-care is critical whether it be a daily 30-60 minutes of “me” time to exercise, read, meditate, watch a short movie, take a walk, etc. On a weekly or monthly schedule we might need a massage, haircut, visit an old friend, attend an inspiring event, and so on.

With the intense schedules we have and all the little accidentals that add to that, if we don’t actually schedule that time for ourselves, it’s bound to be stolen from us.

But isn’t taking time for ourselves selfish when others, especially our families, need us? We are taught to

sacrifice and serve. Remember that analogy of a candle being thrown in the water? How do you let your light shine when you drown struggling to meet the needs of others? A little self-care goes a long way in energizing and recharging your light so you have the energy to illuminate the path for others as you guide and care for them. Grab your calendar and decide something you can do for yourself on a daily, weekly, monthly and even yearly basis. Then stick to the plan, and if something truly is more urgent than you reading that book you’ve been longing to read, reschedule that time and work at that important self-care!

Put these keys into practice and remember to:

[Be a Marriage Maker not breaker!](#)

Andy and Jennifer Smith

P.S. Jennifer has a special offer to strengthen your marriage even more! For the next 72 hours, she is gifting you a free 30-minute Marriage Booster Call that is worth \$200 and will help you create a stronger, happier marriage. When you schedule your call, you’ll get it absolutely free! Schedule your call at this link:

<https://calendly.com/jennifersmith/ma>