

MARRIAGE EXERCISE #6 - LISTENING

LISTENING TO YOUR WIFE

Rationale

Really listening to our wives . . . both with their words and their feelings . . . could be the most loving thing we can do. This challenge will focus on learning how to be a better listener.

Challenge Assignment

The first three levels of listening are attending, content, and feeling. We want to get better at these this month. Read on . . .

Attending - The most basic listening skill, attending has to do with physical positioning. When I attend to someone, I simply face them, maintain good eye contact, and show them with my body that I'm paying attention. I'm not looking at my phone or out the window. I'm looking at them. My hands are quiet. I'm not "fidgeting" . . . tapping my fingers or foot. I'm physically focused on the person I'm listening to. Everyone can do this one. Practice it with your wife *daily* for the next month.

Content - Next, focus on the content of what she's saying. Word for word, track the exact words she says, trying not to interpret or read between the lines. The content of what a person is saying is just that. It doesn't include their feelings about what they're saying, and it doesn't include your interpretation of what they're saying (or trying to say). It's just what they're saying, just as it would be typed by a court reporter. Practice this by repeating what they say . . . "You said ____." You'll quickly see just how hard it is to really, really listen.

Feeling - We are always feeling something. And when we are talking, we are feeling something as we're communicating. If I'm telling you about the birth of my new granddaughter, I'm feeling happy because grandkids are so much fun. Or if I'm describing her delivery, I may be feeling relieved, as she is healthy, has all of her faculties, and both she and her mother are doing fine. We're always communicating a feeling when we talk, and the best listeners are those who can read those feelings and connect with them. Practice this one by paying close attention to your wife when she's speaking. Then, at the appropriate time, say back to her . . . "You feel ____." And use the 'feeling

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word' that you think describes how she feels *right now*, as she's telling you the story. You'll be amazed at a couple of things . . . how hard it is to come up with a good word to guess what she's feeling, and the powerful emotional response she will have when you get it right. Our wives love to be *felt* . . . they love to be heard and understood. When you demonstrate that you heard what she said *and* connected with her feeling, she'll respond . . . and sometimes powerfully. Your assignment is to practice these listening skills with your wife (and feel free to practice with others) and share what happened at our next group.

Debrief

Have a conversation about listening. Share what happened when you attempted to become a better listener for your wife. Invite the other guys to share their experiences . . . the good, the bad, and the ugly.