

Selflessness

5. The Emotional Bank Account

Rationale

Married people live in a bubble together. You share almost everything. In the 'day to day' of life, it's easy to lose sensitivity for your wife because it's all about "getting it done." Gaining an understanding of the tasks that give her energy as well as those that drain her gives you a 'cheat sheet' on how to selflessly serve her...to take things off her that drain energy. Some of those things might actually *give you energy!* How cool would that be?

Challenge Assignment

You and your wife are to work through the list of activities described on the handout and not which make "deposits" and which make "withdrawals" in your wife's emotional bank account. Then you'll pick the top and bottom three and talk about them, increasing your understanding of each other and what makes life bitter and sweet. Come ready to report on the top and bottoms 'three's' and what happened as a result of the exercise.

The "Emotional Bank Account"

The purpose of this exercise is to increase your understanding of each other and what makes life bitter and sweet. Every day, we do things that 'feed us', give us energy, and add to our lives. But we also do things that drain us, take away energy, and wear us out. If we are going to 'live with our wives in an understanding way', we need to know what she does that adds and subtracts to her 'emotional bank account'. And since all of us want to "know and be known", it's probably helpful for her to know the same thing about you.

The goal of this exercise is to increase understanding. It is NOT to shift tasks around, make your spouse feel guilty OR grateful. It's intended to be a communications exercise where you and she 'open up' about what's fun and what's hard in your daily lives.

Following is a list of about 60 activities. Some of these give you and your wife emotional energy...some take it away. The purpose of this exercise is to learn

which is which, and how they affect balances in your “emotional bank accounts.”

Print a copy of the list for each of you. Sit down together but work through this independently. Put a “D” (for ‘deposit’) by the activities you enjoy...that give you emotional energy, and a “W” (for ‘withdrawal’) for those that drain you emotionally.

From the activities you marked with a “W”, you’ll each pick out the bottom three...the three things that take the largest emotional toll when you do them.

DON’T WORRY TOO MUCH ABOUT THOSE THINGS IN THE MIDDLE. FOCUS ON THE TOP FEW AND THE BOTTOM FEW. THE RANKINGS DON’T HAVE TO BE PRECISE. YOU’RE CATEGORIZING “DEPOSITS” AND “WITHDRAWALS” AND LOOKING FOR THE “BIGGIES.”

Because activities takes away emotional energy doesn’t mean you can’t or won’t do them...sometimes you have to. But you and your wife can gain understanding of each other by knowing what “fills you up” AND what “drains you down.”

After you’ve finished, sit down together “in the cool of the evening” and talk about them. Don’t argue or debate. Don’t try to fix anything, take anything away, or add anything to. Just listen and try to understand. Share your “top three” and “bottom three” with each other. If it’s a good conversation, keep going until you’ve shared your lists. It may be painful and/or discouraging to hear some of the things that are “withdrawals” from your wife’s account. But it’s better to know than to not know. And as you discipline yourself to be more selfless, you’ll move toward helping her through those things that drain her emotionally.

Come to the next group session ready to share what happened.

Activities and their effect on your emotional bank accounts.

1. “5 feet for 5 minutes” – Reunite at the end fo the day and talk about how it went.
2. Shop for groceries. Make up the shopping list.
3. Cook dinner, bake.
4. Clean house, do laundry.

5. Shop together for gifts or clothes (for self, kids, or friends)
6. Go out (no kids) for brunch or dinner, or to your favorite haunt.
7. Read the morning paper together
8. Help each other with a self-improvement plan (e.g., a new class, weight loss, exercise, a new career).
9. Plan and host a dinner party.
10. Call and/or think about each other during the workday
11. Stay overnight at a romantic hideaway
12. Eat breakfast together during the work week
13. Go to church together
14. Do yard work, shovel the walk, do home repairs, car maintenance, and washing
15. Perform committee work in the community (e.g. volunteering).
16. Exercise together
17. Go on weekend outings (e.g. picnic, drives).
18. Spend "everyday" time with the kids – Bedtimes, baths, homework.
19. Take the kids on outings (e.g. zoo, museum, dinner).
20. Attend school functions (e.g. teacher conferences)
21. Stay in touch with/spend time with kin (parents, in-laws, siblings).
22. Entertain out-of-town guests
23. Travel together (plane, bus, train, car).
24. Watch TV or videos
25. Order take out
26. Double-date with friends
27. Attend sporting events.
28. Engage in a favorite activity (e.g. bowl, go to amusement park, bicycle, hike, jog, horseback ride, camp, canoes, sail, water-ski, swim).
29. Talk or read together by an open fire.
30. Listen to music.
31. Go dancing or attend a concert, nightclub, jazz club, or theater.
32. Host your child's birthday party.
33. Take you child to lessons
34. Attend you child's sporting events or performance (recital, play, etc.).
35. Pay bills.
36. Write letters or cards.
37. Deal with family medical events (take kids to the doctor, dentist, or emergency room).
38. Work at home, but still be together in some way.
39. Go to a church or community event.
40. Go to a party.

41. Drive to or from work together.
42. Celebrate milestones in your children's lives (baptism, confirmation, graduation).
43. Celebrate other milestones in your lives (e.g. promotion, retirement).
44. Play computer games, surf the internet.
45. Supervise your children's play dates.
46. Plan vacations.
47. Plan your future together. Dream.
48. Walk the dog.
49. Read out loud together.
50. Play a board game or a card game.
51. Put on plays or skits together.
52. Do errands together on a weekend.
53. Engage in hobbies: e.g. painting, sculpting, making music.
54. Talk over drinks (alcohol, coffee, or tea).
55. Take time to just talk without interruptions – find time for spouse to really listen to you
56. Philosophize.
57. Gossip (talk about other people).
58. Attend a funeral.
59. Help out other people.
60. Hunt for a new house or apartment.
61. Test-drive new cars.
62. Other _____.

Adapted from: The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work by John Gottman and Nan Silver. Random House, Inc. February 2002. Kindle Edition. Page 86

Debrief

Every human being wants to know someone and be known by someone. As couples, spouses are the subjects of this knowing. This exercise gave you an opportunity to peel the wrapper back on some stuff you may or may not have known about your wife AND gave you a chance to tell her some things about yourself without sounding like you're bragging or complaining. Lead the guys to share both their and their wife's top three and bottom three and especially what happened as a result of the exercise. Leaders go first!