

Fighting for Your Marriage Session 5

Fine-tuning the speaker/listener technique

In the book *Fighting for Your Marriage* Rule #1 for the Speaker is stated as follows:

Speak for yourself. Don't try to be a mind reader. Talk about your thoughts, feelings, and concerns, not your perceptions of the Listener's point of view or motives. Try to use "I" statements, and talk about your own point of view. "I think you're a jerk" is not an "I" statement. "I was upset when you forgot our date" is. [page 64]

I. Describing Your Feelings:

There are different levels of communication:

Every human being has emotions, feelings, desires, and needs. Many people, especially males, have difficulty in describing these, because we lack a "feeling" vocabulary. Our German-English culture has tended to suppress and hide feelings. Our language reflects this: The English language has only $\frac{1}{3}$ the number of feeling words that the French language has. As a result, though we have feelings, but they are often unnamed and hidden. Describing your feelings will help in the following ways:

*Describing your feelings can get you to the "real issues." Feelings are the part of the iceberg that is hidden under the water.

*Describing your feelings will help you channel your emotions in healthy, godly ways. Unnamed feelings will manifest themselves in some manner: anger, "acting out," depression, psychosomatic illnesses. When we appropriately express our emotions, we "feel better," and can often get what we need to meet our deep felt needs.

*Describing your feelings gives the Listener a window to your soul: Describing how you feel helps the Listener understand what motivates you, what you desire, and what you really need. The Listener won't have to mind-read or guess what you need.

Ways to Describe Your Feelings:

*Identify or name it. "I feel insecure." "I feel abandoned." "I feel enthusiastic about the progress we are making."

*Use similes and metaphors. We do not always have enough labels or names to describe our emotions so we sometimes invent what we call similes and metaphors to describe feelings. Examples: "I feel squelched." "I felt like a cool breeze going through the air." "I feel lower than a snake's belly in a wagon wheel rut."

*Report the type of action your feelings urged you to do. "I felt like hugging you." "I feel like I could hit you."

*Use figures of speech, such as "The sun is smiling on me today." "I feel like a dark cloud is following me around today."

II. Using "I" statements rather than "You" statements:

I statements are sentences that begin with the word "I." In Ephesians 4:29 the Lord explains to us his purpose for our verbal communication:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

God wants the words you speak to be helpful, encouraging, and beneficial for the listener to hear. "I" statements do not blame or accuse others for your thoughts, feelings, needs or desires. Therefore they are less likely to provoke resistance, anger, or resentment and hence, less likely to hurt the relationship. An I-message is a statement of fact rather than an evaluation and therefore is less likely to lower the Listener's self-esteem.

Here's how to break the "You" statement habit:

1. Examine the feeling behind your accusatory "You" statement. Were you hurt? Were you feeling guilty? Resentful? Betrayed? Usually, some primary negative feeling underlies your reacting with a "You" statement.
2. Okay, you got the feeling pinned down? Now express this primary feeling with an "I feel _blank_" statement rather than attacking with a "You" statement.
3. Now follow your "I feel _blank_" statement with a "when" or "because" phrase: "I feel _blank_, when _[such and such occurs]_."

Use I-messages to:

- *Respectfully express your feelings.
- *Demonstrate that you are taking responsibility for your thoughts, beliefs, feelings, needs and desires.
- *Respectfully confront a person about something he or she has done.
- *Request that a need be met or a desire be considered.

*Respectfully ask for something you want.

*Express thanks and appreciation.

Proverbs 15:1 says: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word just stirs up anger." One of the ways to be gentle in our speech is by using "I" statements rather than "You" statements.

III. Watch Your Body Language:

God understands the importance of body language: "The Lord make His face to shine upon you... The Lord turn His countenance upon you and give you peace" Numbers 6:24-25.

Of a person's total communication:

The actual words account for only ___7___ percent.

Tone of voice accounts for ___38___ percent.

Body language accounts for ___55___ percent.

[Return to Marriage Class](#)