

HOW TO TALK TO MEN

Most communications can have one of two impacts: they can bring people closer together, or create distance. Too often we don't think about that before we speak, nor do we develop habits that are conducive to more effective communication. For the sake of this article, I'm going to address typical heterosexual communication, more specifically ways for women to communicate more effectively with men.

Unproductive habits include waiting for him to read our mind, making him wrong for not doing so, and punishing him for it. Some couples really have stamina and can do this for years on end. Their communication consists of bickering, unresolved fights, lobbing emotional grenades at each other because they're not 'getting their needs met'. Let me tell you: nobody was put on this earth to meet our needs. I know; nobody likes to hear that.

So what are the alternatives? Build your man up, set him up to win. There are women who take men down, and those who build them up. You know who you are. It's ok. We're all doing the best we know how. Man bashing is an insidious message we get from the culture. It's not overt necessarily; it's subtle, but damaging. And the worst part is that women don't get what they want from men that way. When you set a man up to win, it doesn't mean that you lose. On the contrary. When you can increase a man's sense of his manhood (and I'm not just talking about sex here) (but that too), his self-esteem blossoms, he feels empowered, and better able to get the 'win'. Men have binary brains: every situation is either a win or a lose. It's not wrong. It's just one of the ways that men are not women. Men generally thrive on wins; they need a lot of them. It's not at all that they're frail creatures who need to be pumped up; it's how they're put together. And there's great value in it. When a man is happy at work, feels effective, get successes, that's a win. Each new client, each sale, each happy customer, each time his supervisor praises him, he's a winner. It's similar in relationships.

Setting a man up to win is telling him what would make you happy, and inviting him to please you. Not demanding: inviting. When a woman demands, a man only has two choices: he can submit and comply (not a win), or he can rebel (not a win either). Inviting would be something like: "Honey, it would really help me out if you would take out the trash". He wants to help, he takes out the trash, you're pleased, he wins, everybody wins. It might also sound like: "Sweetie, it would really make me happy if we had a date night at that French restaurant this Friday; I could wear my new dress and you'd look so handsome in that suit we got you last year. Would you be willing to make a reservation for an early dinner for us?" Be specific. He wants to make you happy. I guarantee it; that's how men are. If you communicate clearly, then he knows what to do to get the win: make the reservation, wear the suit, and take you out to dinner at the French restaurant.

Here's another important piece: when a man does something that pleases you...thank him! Several times. Thank him in the moment, and be specific about what pleased you (it made you feel cared for, it helped you somehow...). And thank him again later, in an unrelated moment: "Remember when you complimented me on my outfit? That made me feel pretty." "I've noticed you haven't been leaving your shoes in the middle of the hallway. I really appreciate that. I feel safer and not afraid to trip over them

anymore.” When you thank him, that’s a win for him, and he will want to do what pleases you again, so that you are pleased again. Never underestimate the impact of praising and thanking a man, with a smile and direct eye contact, whether it’s your mate, a busboy in a restaurant, the guy helping you at the hardware store. A smile reads as a win to a man, and facilitates you both getting what you want.

When you want to talk to a man, pick an opportune time, a time that will set you both up for success. Men’s brains are single-focused - in other words, they’re best-suited to only focusing on one thing at a time. Women tend to have multi-tasking brains. Again, neither is better; it’s just different, and serves different purposes. So if you want to approach him to discuss something, don’t do it when he’s focused on something else. When he’s watching a football game on TV, fixing the car, doing e-mail, helping little Johnny assemble his new toy...he’s not available. And he won’t be able to give you his undivided attention, which is what you want, right? He may grunt in response, and you assume that he has heard and understood you. Later you wonder why he doesn’t remember. He genuinely doesn’t. Pick a time when he can focus on you. Catch him in between tasks. You might even want to ask if it’s a good time to discuss what color to paint the den, plan his mother’s birthday party, RSVP to a dinner invitation...

When giving a man feedback, give him the ‘positive sandwich’: you start with a positive (“I love how you...”), give him the constructive criticism (“And it would make me even happier if...”), and end with a positive (“You’re such a wonderful...(lover, cook, father, planner)”).

Here’s a biggie: making a man wrong is a lose. Cumulatively, it whittles away at his sense of manhood and empowerment. It’ll make him angry and cause him to withdraw. You may have noticed. Don’t make him wrong. Period. Give it up.

I got married recently. We wrote our vows separately and surprised each other with them. I had been jotting things down over a period of months, and one thing kept coming up for me: my beloved has zero tolerance for being made wrong. It just doesn’t work for us. The first thing that I committed to in my vows was to try to not make him wrong, and that if I wanted to make him wrong, I committed to figuring out what was going on with me that caused me to do so. Because when you make somebody wrong it’s information about you, not about them. I know, you probably don’t like hearing that either. But I’m right on this. These unconventional vows really resonated with my beloved, as well as with the audience, the men especially. They’re still talking about it. I think I struck a chord. As far as our marriage goes, so far so good.

I didn’t invent any of this. I’ve pieced it together over the years from other experts, as well as my own personal and professional experience. Try it. It works. You’ll have more harmonious relationships with men... All men.