

5 Ways To Improve Communication

With Your Spouse or Partner



CASE STUDY BONUS INCLUDED!

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A Note From Barbara

Nearly every couple who has requested counseling from me has brought a communication issue as one of their problems. Most of the time it was first on their list, and for good reason.

My books "*He Said, She Said, I Said, - 7 Keys To Relationship Success*", and "*The Gift of a Lifetime: Building a Marriage that Lasts*" both stress this skill as the first of the seven keys to relationship success.

Here is a brief eBook using excerpts from each book to target some of the communication highlights from those books, plus I have included a bonus case study. I hope to help you achieve better communication in your relationships with these practical tips and techniques.

If you need more relationship guidance, I encourage you to check out my two relationship books and I will post the links to purchase at Amazon at the end of the eBook.

I wish you the very best,

Barbara J. Peters

5 Ways To Improve Communication With Your Spouse or Partner

eBook Series – Barbara J. Peters

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Good communication can be the glue that holds a relationship together and can make the difference between a happy meaningful relationship or one of contention and strife.

The more you can communicate and really hear and understand each other, the closer and more intimate you can become. A large percentage of couples seeking counseling have issues around communication, and while it may not be “the only problem,” it certainly is responsible for many areas of relationship conflict.

But let’s take a step back and define what communication really is. People sometimes have the misconception that talking is communicating, but many times that is far from the truth.

Talking is often one-sided, whereas communication requires both parties speaking their thoughts and desires and then *actively* listening to what your partner is saying as well.

WHEN IS COMMUNICATION A PROBLEM?

Let’s take a look at some very common communication experiences. Some of these statements may seem familiar to you. Maybe you have heard them or even said them yourself.

"I feel we have poor communication and our relationship is one-sided, focusing mostly on her needs."

"I have plenty of needs, but I'm not sure how to ask for them, or if he even cares what they may be."

"I'm not really sure she loves me the way I love her, and because of that, I find myself holding back my feelings."

"It's really hard to feel loving toward him when he won't allow me to get close enough to see who he really is."

"I want to talk with him about issues like the kids, his mother, and my frustrations about trying to have a career and be a good mom. But every time I try to bring up these subjects, he either closes down or gets angry. I don't want him to fix the problems; I just want to be able to talk with him about our lives."

“When she uses that tone of voice with me or puts her hand on her hip, I don’t feel like her husband, I feel like her child and I just close down.”

“I am majorly pissed off at him, yet I’m afraid to make emotional statements because of his outbursts, which cause our efforts at communication to escalate without resolution.”

“I think I am communicating with her, yet it’s not what she wants or needs, and I don’t have a clue what to do differently.”

As you can see from the above real-life examples of miscommunication - not only is communication and clarity a problem, but there is also a lack of understanding.

In this eBook I have shared a few techniques and tips together to help you communicate smarter with your partner and maybe break some common miscommunication patterns.

1. DEFINING CONCEPTS

Are You Both On The Same Page?

Defining concepts for better understanding is a key to successful communication. One of the biggest hurdles people face in communicating is how they define their issues.

How something is defined in one person's mind may not be the same as the person hearing it. Two people can define the same words quite differently.

An example might clarify this better.

Let's say the spouse is complaining about how much time he or she gets to spend with the other.

She says, "He doesn't spend much time with me anymore."

He says, "What do you mean? I am sitting with you in our living room every night."

She replies, "You might be there in body, but you are usually looking at your cell phone or playing video games."

Get the drift yet? She wants interaction, and he is involved with his phone. They are indeed surprised to find out they are not on the same page.

Making sure you are talking about the same thing can avoid unnecessary conflict.

2. WHAT YOU SAY AND WHAT THEY HEAR MAY BE DIFFERENT

Being Clear About Your Topic Is Important!

A lack of clear communication can attribute to miscommunication which can prolong a much needed resolution.

A useful method to clarify communication is called “mirroring” or “reflective listening.”

In this strategy, the listener tries to clarify, restate, or paraphrase what he or she hears. It might sound like this: “What I hear you saying is.....”

This approach allows your significant other to confirm or deny that what you heard is what was said to you. Your partner then has the opportunity to add to the message or rephrase the words for a more accurate delivery.

You can also say, “tell me more.” This request opens the door for both of you to get clear on what is really being discussed.

It might sound like this: “So I hear that you are not happy with the way I handle our finances and you think I am being too budget conscious.” This allows the receiver to affirm or deny and it might sound like this: “Well I am happy that you take an interest, but the truth is we don’t have to watch things that closely.”

This then allows the dialogue to move forward and get more clarity.

3. THE HIDDEN CRITICISM TECHNIQUE

Get your point across without damaging egos.

Let's explore the effect our communication has on someone else. Being too direct can cause another to become defensive and close down. This method I call the "criticism sandwich."

Here it is: Make your first sentence a positive statement, then let your second sentence be the criticism, complaint, or request. Then follow it up with another positive one. So, it's positive statement – critical statement – positive statement.

It might sound like this: "You really do a lot to be helpful around the house. However, the one thing that gets me frustrated is that you leave your shoes everywhere, and I have tripped on them frequently. It would be helpful if you could be more mindful of where you put them. But I really am lucky that you help so much with the kids, the pets, and some chores. This help makes my life so much better."

Why is this technique easy to implement? Most people pay more attention to the first and last statement. That does not mean the middle sentence (about the shoes) goes unnoticed. It does mean that the request has a better chance of being fulfilled.

We all like praise more than criticism! The praise softens the blow of the criticism. Sometimes it is necessary to tell a spouse about an irritating or negative action. Knowing how to approach someone in a more effective manner can help the outcome you want.

4. ASK FOR AN EXPLANATION INSTEAD

Accusatory Statements Can Keep Things Stirred Up

It's so easy to blast direct statements at your partner when you are frustrated. "Why do you always do this when I ask you not to!" "Why do you never help me clean the kitchen!" "Why didn't you take out the garbage!" "I told you I needed help with the laundry and you're still watching tv!"

The *cool and calm explanation* is a fun technique. This is one of my favorites and it usually opens the door to better communication or at least it may stop the escalation into something else.

It's even more effective when you stay eerily calm. I say eerily in jest because most partners expect the other to "fly off the handle" when confronted.

Whether you are speaking to another adult or even a child simply ask for an explanation. "Can you please explain why you did this when I specifically asked you not to?" "Could you explain to me why you are not helping clean the kitchen?" "Would you like to explain why the garbage is still sitting here?" "Can you explain why you're watching tv with a load of laundry still in the basket?"

When you ask in this manner they'll usually not become defensive. They will have a thought process to come up with an answer. You didn't accuse them of anything. You simply asked in a soft way and they should answer in a soft way. Most times they will apologize for the oversight and get right on it.

5. STAY CLOSE AND KEEP THINGS INTERESTING

Learn Something New About Your Partner

I have often heard that couples don't have anything to talk about other than kids, work, or household honey-do lists. That kind of conversation can get boring. It doesn't allow time to make new discoveries about your partner.

We keep growing and changing during the years we are together. Often, we think we know who our partner is and what he or she likes, but time changes things.

Maybe a few years ago you were interested in decorating a house and buying new furniture. Now, you may be more interested in volunteer work and growing herbs. How do you know what your spouse is dreaming of if you do not take the time to find out?

To keep a relationship alive, you both need to make an investment in an exploration of each person's needs and interests. Here are some ways to avoid disenchantment and create new intimacy.

- Find out what your partner likes to do. Ask questions about hobbies, interests, and desires that may have been put on hold.
- Be willing to join an activity with your partner.
- Talk about your own dreams and goals.
- See how the goals you both have measure up, and find similarities to build upon.

BONUS: CASE STUDY

This is an example from my book *He said, She Said, I Said*.

He said, "I'm not very sure she loves me the way I love her; and because of that, I hold back my feelings."

I said, "Have you ever felt you loved more than you were loved in return? If so, what did that feel like? Did you feel your expression of love was clear to your spouse or partner, but theirs wasn't clear to you? When you felt that way, did you make your feelings known to your spouse in a caring loving manner? If not, then why not?"

Instead, did you just decide your spouse or partner wasn't putting forth equal effort to grow your relationship and then make the assumption that he or she didn't love you as much as you loved them? There is a fallacy in that thinking. No two people act or behave in the same way, and therefore may have different ways of expressing love.

Just because you are not recognizing those behaviors as statements of love doesn't mean they are not happening. Instead of assuming your partner doesn't love you as much as you love them, open up communication around the subject instead of closing down."

It is always good to communicate how you define love to your partner or spouse and then ask how they view a loving relationship. Asking questions is a sure way of finding out about the person you have chosen to make your life partner, as well as your lifelong friend.

The questions could be as simple as: “What are some of the things I do that let you know I love you?” “What are some of the things you do to express your love to me?”

You may be surprised by the answers because behaviors you exhibit, which you probably consider extremely loving, might not be at the top of your partner’s list. In turn, your partner’s actions or words, which might not hold much significance for you, could be the very things they consider to be important gestures that show how much they love and care about you. It’s all in the way we perceive things.

Since communication is sometimes easier between friends than it is with a partner, continue to work on being a friend to your partner as well as a lover.

Communication on many levels will help you understand what your partner is thinking and feeling, as well as give you an opportunity to express your own needs.

SUMMARY

What you have just read in this little eBook are some ways to improve what you already have and to continue a lifelong relationship with understanding and clarity.

Don't give up if it goes wrong sometimes - just get right back in there with some positive words.

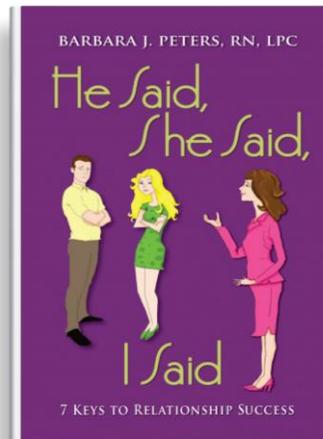
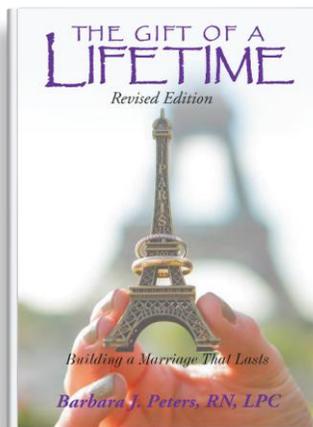
As the contestant Nightbirde said on *America's Got Talent* a few weeks ago: "You can't wait until life isn't hard anymore before you decide to be happy."

Go for it and keep going - even if it seems challenging. It's all up to you.

From Barbara J. Peters

My hope is that this short eBook will give you some additional tools to create a new, loving relationship in the future.

For more relationship help I have written two popular books on having great relationships [The Gift Of A Lifetime - Building A Marriage That Lasts](#) and one on saving relationships [He Said, She Said, I Said – 7 Keys To Relationship Success](#).



I enjoyed writing them so much and know they have helped many couples over the years, and they may be of further help to you also.

I also write regular blog posts on my website BarbaraJPeters.com with most topics on common relationship problems and how to resolve them, so please check them out too.

With love and care,
Barbara J. Peters