

Soft and Slow

A recent Wall Street Journal article described the growing trend of CEO's going to therapy. It makes a lot of sense when you think about it. They're under great pressure, they're supposed to have all the answers, and their ability to communicate with others is crucial. But to make therapy work for them they have to adjust their pace. They have to realize that psychological changes don't happen at the speed of business.

A lot of my clients have to learn the same lesson.

"When I get home and my wife brings up a problem with the kids, I tend to fire off answers like I would in a meeting," said Kirk. "I couldn't understand why she got her feelings hurt or felt criticized. Now, I know that she wanted to connect and bring me back into the family, not just check off a problem on her list. What I've learned is that I have to slow way down when I hit the front door."

Slow is one of the magic words for relationships. And another one is soft. How you say it is just as important as what you say and if you say it slow and soft, you'll be amazed at what happens.

A soft voice tells your partner that you care and that you will be gentle with him. A soft voice tends to draw people closer to you and invite them to open up. Think about how you react when a child comes up to you crying. Don't you automatically soften your voice? Instinctively, you know how to make him feel safe and comforted.

On the other hand, a loud tone will tend to push people away.

"My boyfriend teaches middle school," said Dana, "and for awhile I was puzzled about the sharp tone he takes on sometimes. Then, one day, I got it. He's talking to me the way he does to his kids. What a turn off! Now, I just say, don't use your Mr. Fletcher voice on me."

Once you've mastered soft, try adding slow. A soft tone uncovers feelings. A slow pace allows those feelings to unfold. Think about exploring a new neighborhood on foot as opposed to by car. On foot, you get a much better feel for it. You can see the detail of the plants, the texture of the houses.

If you're looking for intimacy, set off on foot. Intimacy is about sharing all the subtle ins and outs of experience. Not: "What a rough day. The boss was really breathing down my neck." But instead: "Dave was telling me how important this project is and my stomach was upset for the rest of the day. It's always in the back of my mind. I guess I'm wondering if I'll really be able to pull it off."

If your wedding is coming up, now's the time to think about soft and slow. Not only do you need to keep an eye on your teacher voice or your executive voice, you need to beware of your wedding planner voice. I'm sure I don't have to tell you that wedding

planning will propel you into hyperspeed just as effectively as work, if not more so. And if you're like a lot of brides, running on high gear can become a way of life without you even realizing it. It is all too easy talk to your fiancé as though you're making a quick call to your caterer or florist.

Right now, your priority should be keeping stress to a minimum and staying connected to your fiancé right up to your wedding. You'll find this easier if you make a conscious effort to switch from switch gears from planning mode to relationship mode. These tips will help.

- Take a breath and just sit for a moment. Let the inner rush subside.
- Approach your partner with an open heart. Commit yourself to discovering him at his best.
- Give yourself time and don't sweat the small stuff. Many times it's wise to leave chores or errands undone in favor of connecting with your partner.
- Remember than there are more important things than efficiency. A wedding that goes off without a hitch is meaningless if you're not feeling intimate with your fiancé.
- After your partner speaks, just wait. This lets him know that you're ready to hear everything he has to say.

Get in the habit of reminding yourself to go soft and slow, and see what a difference it makes.

Bonus: It works with your parents, your friends, and your future in-laws, too.

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