

What's the Matter with John?

Last Saturday, I was catching up on some bookkeeping in my home office. Around noon, my husband John came into my office and said, "It's time to have lunch and STOP WORKING. It's the WEEKEND."

"I know. I just want to do a little more so I can feel good-"

"That's it! That's the sign of a workaholic! They only feel good when they're working."

"I don't mean that kind of feel good. I mean I want to feel like everything's under control on Monday morning."

What's the matter with him? Why is he on a hair trigger about me doing a couple of hours of work? These days it seems like I can hardly check my email without him bringing up this crazy idea that I'm a workaholic.

Then I stopped and thought. Why would someone keep saying the same thing over and over? Any psych 101 student can tell you that. Because they don't feel like they're being heard or understood. Hmmm, so what is it that he wants me to hear?

I realized I could use some advice--from myself!

Remember The [Laser Lifestyle](#) article from last January? I talked about how a laser beam focus on goals can work well at the office. But when it turns into a habit and you bring it home, you start to miss things.

You can't just zoom in on the important parts, because you might not know what the important parts are. Your partner and your relationship are in a constant state of change. When you live with someone day to day, it's easy to forget that. You think you already know them so well.

You need to drop the laser focus and look at your partner through a wide-angle lens. Make that, I need to look at my partner through a wide-angle lens. With a sense of discovery. And openness to whatever I find.

When I trained a wide-angle lens on John, I noticed a theme.

"I'm going to send you on vacation somewhere where there's no email."

"Don't take it so seriously-I was just joking."

"You've forgotten how to play."

Now I could see what was the matter with him. **He missed me.** He especially missed a certain part of me. The relaxed part. The light-hearted, playful part.

How can I give him more of that part? I need more down time. Time when I'm not responsible for anything. I need to take a look at my schedule and decide what I can let go of. It won't be easy. I'll have to say no to things I'd really like to do. I'll worry that I'm not fulfilling my potential. I'll have to disappoint some people. **But the crucial thing is that I don't disappoint my number one person-my husband.**

As you can see, I'm still working out the details. But I'm making progress. Yesterday, a friend called to ask me to be on a board next year and I said no. I think that's an excellent start. And, as you can imagine, so does John.

Your Questions

Dear Claire,

I'm really stressed. I'm getting married in a month. I've always been so sure he was the right one, but lately I've been having doubts.

I feel like he expects me to do all the compromising, and when I try to tell him how I feel, he shuts down or rolls his eyes, or says that's just the way he is.

I don't know if he's being disrespectful to me, or we just need some help with communication.

Help!

Angie

Dear Angie,

I'm sorry to hear you're having such a tough time. It can be hard to tell serious doubts from normal wedding jitters at this point in your engagement.

It sounds like your fiancé is trying to protect himself from feeling criticized or from getting involved in a stressful conversation. Nine times out of ten, when someone is putting up a wall, he's trying to protect himself from feeling hurt or anxious. But from the outside, it looks like he doesn't care. So, try to look past the wall and imagine how he's feeling.

Having said that, the eye rolling has got to stop. It will damage your relationship. Here is where counseling can help. A counselor can address the eye rolling in a way that he can hear it, and create the safety that he needs to come out from behind his wall. And help you express yourself in a way that doesn't make him feel criticized.

A counselor can also help you flesh out your doubts about getting married, which you absolutely need to do before your wedding.

Have you tried to find a counselor in your area? If you need help finding someone, let me know.

I wish you the best,
Claire

Claire Hatch, LICSW, is a licensed counselor who helps people raise self-esteem and turn conflict to connection. She works with clients in her Seattle area office and by phone around the world. Claire gives seminars on how to settle conflicts, tame stress, and balance family and work.

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