
Claire Hatch Counseling Newsletter

Tips and Tools for Happier Relationships

March 2004

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When it comes to staying connected and understanding one another, you can't have too many perspectives. In this issue, you get to hear about the experiences of two men. I hope you enjoy what they have to say.

But first, some tips on how to make your partner really feel understood.

Are You Listening?

You've probably heard it said that listening is the most difficult of all communication skills. There must be something to this, because not being listened to is the number one thing people complain about in their relationships.

I think one reason listening can be tough is we're such an action-oriented people. We spend our days doing, solving, implementing. We kind of feel at loose ends if we're "just listening." How do I know if I'm being helpful or not? When is it good to speak?

Here are some tips to bring "just listening" into clearer focus. When your partner is upset with you, has had a hard day, or just has something important on her mind, these ideas can really bring you closer together.

1. **Listen 3 times more than you talk.** At some point, you'll probably see your partner draw a deep breath and relax. That tells you she's getting what she needs.
2. **Listen for the primary concern.** This might take some time. The primary concern might be buried under other concerns and it might take you awhile to uncover it.
3. **Keep listening even after she's done.** Normally, a conversation goes like this. I'm listening. When the other person finishes a sentence and pauses, I figure he's done. And that means what? It's my turn. (Finally!) But see what happens if you keep listening. Often that's the moment when your partner will tell you her primary concern.

At the beginning, she'll talk about things that are less important. She's testing the waters. Then, if she senses that you're really listening, she'll tell you the heart of the matter. She may not even realize what the heart of the matter IS until just that moment, especially if she's upset. Have you ever noticed that when you're upset you don't always know why? Neither does your partner. Listening even when she pauses gives her the support she needs to discover it.

4. **Summarize her primary concern.** This will make her feel even more understood and of course, it will let you know whether you do understand or not. Then, if there's a problem to be solved, you'll know that you're solving the right problem!

For example:

Your partner says: I've been trying to get my boss to discuss this project for a week.

You say: You're frustrated because you can't get input from your boss on what you're supposed to be doing.

Now your partner feels relaxed and supported. She feels that you understand what's going on with her. And maybe she even understands it better herself, which is always comforting. You're well on your way to a cozy evening together. Not only that, now she'll be more interested in what you have to say!

Finding a New Home-Together

So many people I work with get into conflict over buying a house, that I asked my buddy, realtor Andy Weiffenbach, for some advice. Read on for his top 4 pointers for couples and home buying.

I never knew I would become an undercover counselor when I began my real estate career. But it really shouldn't have surprised me. It takes a lot of communication and compromise for a couple to agree on the purchase of a home. When they hit a roadblock, not only is it stressful, it can mean missing that window of opportunity to buy their dream house.

From observing hundreds of couples, I've come up with 4 simple steps to help my clients make a successful home selection AND have a harmonious experience at the same time.

Step 1: Initiate a sit-down discussion to define what each of you is looking for. Listen to each other and be open about your needs and the reasons for them. Listen hard to your spouse's feelings about what they want. Write down everything you both want. Then, weigh out the differences and come to a compromise on the 3 most important characteristics you want in your home. These 3 criteria will guide you as you look at homes. Half way through your search, you will probably be tempted to change these criteria. But your original decisions will most often be correct and you'll glad you kept to your agreement with your spouse.

Step 2: Review your 3 criteria before and after you view a home. Does the home meet them? If it does not, and you try to persuade your spouse to move forward with a purchase, Dr. Phil would not be impressed. Now is not the time to redefine the criteria, it's the time to meet the criteria.

Step 3: Once you have found a few exciting homes that meet the three criteria sit down again and compare notes. Explain why you think one is better and listen respectfully to your spouse's opinions. For example, "Yes, the garage is great, but the kitchen isn't fitted with granite." Remember, if you try to talk your spouse into a house he or she doesn't really want, you could be setting the stage for years of resentment.

Step 4: Select a realtor you both respect. If you don't, you won't be open to your realtor's suggestions and won't be able to benefit from all of his or her experience. Make sure your realtor really understands what you're looking for. And watch out for a realtor who urges you to buy every home you look at. Your 3 criteria are the key, and a professional who understands the realtor's role will help you achieve them.

Keep your spouse in the forefront of your mind and you will have an exciting experience and a home you love to live in.

Want more information? Feel free to get in touch with Andy.

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A Super Bowl Win

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One man's communication tip...

"I definitely try to find root causes more now than I did before counseling. Previously, any time my fiancée was upset, I would just try to avoid contact and maybe address what she was upset about. Now, I try to drill down and figure out why she's upset.

I actually managed to prevent a big blow up last week about wedding plans vs. Super Bowl plans. At first, she seemed upset that I wanted to see the Super Bowl on a day that we were planning on doing wedding stuff. I pointed out we could do both.

After going around a few times, it turned out she was just stressed about being behind about wedding plans in general. I figured out what tasks I could do and then did them. She felt better and I didn't have a ticked-off fiancée. **Win-Win!"**

Chris Hubbard  
Redmond, WA

### **Seminar-How to Get Along With Anyone**

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When things get tense, do you give in just to get along? Or overreact and say things you regret? Then come to the class I'll be teaching at Evergreen Hospital on May 13. You'll learn to let go of dangerous thoughts that sabotage relationships. Get a template for problem-solving, a script for 'hard talks,' and tips for making yourself understood. If you have a partner, boss, co-worker, or child who is driving you crazy, then you'll definitely want to join us.

Thursday, May 13, 7:00-9:00pm
Evergreen Hospital
Kirkland

To register, call the Evergreen Community Class program at: 425 899-3000.

Questions? Call me: 425 823-2273.

Contact Information

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| <p>Claire Hatch, LICSW, is a counselor who specializes in happier relationships and turning conflict into closeness. She works with clients in her Seattle area office and by phone around the world. She gives presentations on conflict solutions and making your relationship the best it can be. For more information, visit <a href="http://www.clairehatch.com">www.clairehatch.com</a>. Contact Claire at 425 823-2273 or <a href="mailto:claire@clairehatch.com">claire@clairehatch.com</a></p> |
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