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Marital Communication: Influencing and Persuading Your Spouse

By Shelle Rose Charvet

Why does my husband always disagree?

Why does my wife put my ideas down?

One of the most irritating aspects of life as a united couple is trying to convince your spouse when they take a Macho attitude. Wives say that when they want to suggest an idea to their spouse, or get an agreement that a problem needs to be fixed, they are often faced with denial and negative attitudes. Husbands report that when they want to try something new, their partners often reject their suggestion without proper consideration. And both men and women say that they resent tiptoeing around on eggshells to avoid getting their life partners angry.

Some people seem to be constantly negative or skeptical. How can you influence someone who always looks for the crack or the loophole in what you say? Doesn't it seem unfair that it's often with your life partner that you have the least credibility? What do you have to do to get taken seriously? It can be easier to just give up rather than spend time and energy trying to get people to listen.

When a person is running what we call a Macho Pattern, they operate as if they believe the following:

- * They already know everything there is to know.
- * They do not have any problems; they and everything connected with them are perfect.
- * If there are problems, they are of someone else's making.
- * They are better, higher, more important, and more knowledgeable than anyone else.

How many times have you made major decisions to assuage someone's ego or to prevent them from losing face? Just listen to media interviews. When the interviewer asks if someone were surprised by the turn of events, rarely if ever will the person admit to being surprised. That would be saying that they did not already know everything there is to know.

Once I sold a sales training program with optional follow-up coaching. No one took up the coaching

offer because that would have meant conceding they needed help. Now the coaching is just part of the training program.

All of us have the tendency to become Macho at times. Notice your reaction when one of your parents tells you what to do!

To make sure that even your spouse will consider your ideas, you could use this Macho Test as an editing technique.

Is it anywhere stated or implied that?

1. There is something they don't already know,
2. I am telling them what to do,
3. They have a problem and I have the solution,

4. They are not perfect in some way, and/or
5. I am better than they are in some way.

If any of the above are stated or implied, **it does not pass the Macho Test!** You may wish to rephrase as follows:

1. As you probably know...Then state the thing you suspect they do not know
2. Use the language of suggestion: You may wish to consider...
3. I understand that other couples have had this issue and what some of them have done is...How have you solved this problem?
(This implies they have already solved all the problems)
4. With your experience and knowledge in this area...
5. Your role is... My role is...
(This lets you establish different yet equal roles)

Next time when you sense if you present a 'new' idea, your spouse will deny it's actually new, try suggesting that it may be something they have already considered. You probably already know exactly who all the Machos are in your life. Once rephrase your thoughts to pass the Macho Test, your spousal partner may become more willing to participate in the free flow of ideas.

Shelle Rose Charvet, author of Words That Change Minds and Presenting Ideas To Skeptical People, consults, writes and speaks on what makes people do what they do. Subscribe to

for FREE TIPS on improving your spousal communication and persuasion skills.

Prenuptial Agreements

By Johnette Duff

Marital Communication: Influencing and Persuading Your Spouse

"Til death do us part" is still the language used in most weddings. Couples enter marriage with the hope of making a lifetime commitment. If this goal is not reached or if a spouse dies, the desire to be a couple is so ingrained that most will marry again.

The inability of the marriage laws to meet the needs of many couples makes the concept of a marital agreement quite positive, despite the bad publicity premarital agreements have reached. The freedom to structure a relationship should not be determined by laws that do not reflect the changing realities of family life in American today.

There is no firm tradition of marital contracts in our country because of the inherent resistance of comparing love to a business deal. Many civilized societies through the ages, however, have documented marital agreements with written documents.

Celebrities and the media have made couples aware of the concept of a contract executed between a married couple, whether terming it a premarital, prenuptial, antenuptial or postmarital agreement. The rich have known about them for years, but middle-class America, alarmed about the rising divorce rate, is anxious to know more.

Who Needs Them?

Anyone about to enter a marriage who is concerned about the inadequacies of the laws in the face of today's social realities;

Anyone who is remarrying;

Anyone concerned about protecting the assets of children from a prior marriage;

Anyone who has a financially dependent parent;

Business owners, particularly of professional practices and particularly those with business partners, because a spouse effectively becomes a silent partner in the business;

Anyone with significant separate property in states where a spouse is entitled to a share of income from separate property.

Anyone whose intended spouse has significant premarital responsibilities, such as alimony, child support, or tax obligations.

Anyone cautious enough to prefer a written record of the ownership of assets to avoid confusion in the future from creditors or other family members.

It's not romantic; it's practical. And limiting a spouse's take upon divorce is far from the only purpose, despite the perception gleaned from the popular press. Doesn't it make sense to make decisions under the best of circumstances instead of during the emotional upheaval of a troubled relationship?

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As with most things, there's good news and bad news about private marital contracts. The openness needed for such an agreement is good for a relationship; the implication of a lack of trust is bad. A marital contract can avoid expensive and emotionally debilitating divorce trials, but it's expensive to enforce any contract in court. Such an agreement will reduce to writing the agreement for division of property upon divorce, although it can prevent a spouse from obtaining marital rights upon divorce.

The love and the law newsletter is written by Johnette Duff, Attorney at Law*

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Ms. Duff is licensed in the State of Texas

Johnette Duff is a matrimonial attorney licensed in the state of Texas. She is also the author of three books on love and the law; The Spousal Equivalent Handbook, The Marriage Handbook and Love After 50. Ms. Duff has been featured on Today, Good Morning America, in The Wall Street Journal, Self, New Woman, Smart Money and Modern Maturity and has been a guest on hundreds of radio talk shows.

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