

Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood

*There are three major killers in a marriage:
Communication, Sex, and Finances.*



“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand they listen with the intent to reply“

Stephen Covey

Because most issues in a marriage regarding sex and finances can be resolved by effective communication, communication becomes the tipping point of any relationship and is a mission critical skill set.

Effective communication first starts with intentional and effective listening. Communication in relationships can be difficult. Problems are usually never resolved in a relationship, because while one person is expressing how they feel about something, the other person is thinking of what their comeback will be, instead of truly listening and empathizing with the other.

“Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood” is a concept that initially slows down communication so that each person is truly heard and understood. Since it is very counter-intuitive, in the beginning stages it will be a difficult process. However, just like any skill; practice will make perfect and the benefits will outweigh the initial time invested.

How It Works:

Both parties need to pick a subject that they feel they have been unheard in or feel that it is something they would like to discuss. In the spirit of “ladies first” we will start with the woman.

She will hold whatever object of your choosing and will then begin to express here feelings about a particular subject. Because she is holding “the object” she is the **ONLY** one allowed to speak and the man is now only listening. He is not to be thinking of his response, how to win, or spacing out, but empathetically listening to her. When she is done he will now need to “purchase” the object from her and, the currency to do that is understanding. Before he can give a response, answer, or rebuttal he must purchase the object so that he can speak freely. The currency of that purchase is that he must demonstrate that he understands what was told to him in his own words. He must be able to communicate not only what was said, but also what was meant. When and only when he has been able to clearly articulate with full understanding what was said by her to him, then she may give him the object and he may begin to respond. If she is not sure he has the entirety of the matter then she will continue to hold the object and re-explain, or clarify until the other party is fully clear and able to articulate such clarity. At that point, the object is given to the other party to respond and the process starts all over again with now the

man in possession of the object and the woman must now seek to understand him first before she can respond. This process repeats itself until the couple arrives at resolution and clarity.

Tips for Success

- Using empathetic listening, allowing a person to influence you to understand them, will automatically compel them to allow you to influence them in return. **Remember, unexpressed feelings never die; they are buried alive and come back in uglier ways.**
- An object of your choosing can be used for this exercise. It can be anything from a remote to a pen to a stuffed animal. In our office we use a stuffed Tigger Pillow. What the object is; doesn't matter. What matters is what the object signifies.
- The person holding the object is the ONLY person who can speak and initiate discussion.
- The person speaking must never be interrupted. Listen without interrupting, blurting out, or distracting.
- If for some reason you miss something, you MUST go back and get clear about what you missed, then repeat it. Once you have successfully done that, and are not missing anything, then you can "obtain" the object to respond.
- Not only listen with your ears but with your eyes (focus) and with your heart (empathize)
- Here are some great Seek First to Understand Phrases to use:
 - So you're saying that...
 - As I understand it you feel...
 - As I get you correctly you think....
 - You feel _____ about _____

The purpose of this exercise is to first understand each other by listening and truly empathizing with your significant other. Often times in communication we seek to be understood first then to understand, and most of the time, that type of communication style ends in a screaming match and completely off subject

This exercise will slow down your communication tremendously, so be patient! This is counter-intuitive and takes time, but as you practice you'll get better and better and your communication will move faster and faster without assumptions and arguments, because you will truly be listening to your significant other.