

Communication Breakdown

It happens to the best of us. Communication is such a fickle thing, and the lines of communication can become blurred every so often, especially when feelings are involved. Even those who think that they are immune to the confusion of conflict can find themselves drawn into a communication breakdown when they least expect it, and chaos ensues.

This happened to me on the weekend, and until to be quite honest, it took me by surprise. Even those of us who are better equipped than many others are not immune. My partner told me something that really hurt my feelings, and I lashed back in defense. It was a silly argument, over something as simple as a misplaced bottle of aftershave. But to me, it represented something much deeper, that had been simmering away for a couple of weeks. I get frustrated at having to search for something when it is not where I expect it to be. Worse still when my partner has shifted it and I don't know the first place to begin searching.

Aftershave, needles and thread, car keys, a Tupperware container to store my baking soda in, covers for our outdoor chairs, all were examples of instances where I had to turn the house upside-down. A simple answer from my partner when these things were shifted would have saved me a lot of time and frustration. And the answer I got? "You need to open your eyes and organize yourself better"

I was gutted. When I come home from work I exercise the dog and cook dinner so that it is on the table by the time my partner gets home. The house is always spotless and warm, as I'm very conscious of coming home to a tidy environment. I see this as a fundamental part of my role in coming home first, and it takes a lot of my time. To imply that I have the time to "organize yourself better" really hurt.

I don't expect praise, but I did hope that my efforts were recognized. I got told that "I don't expect you to cook my dinner every night" was interpreted by me as ingratitude, and hurt me even more.

So where to from here? My partner felt guilty at coming home every night to the perfect household, whereas I felt guilty if it wasn't perfect. It was never about me trying to make him feel guilty, but it seems it did. And this is where the communication fell down. He misinterpreted my efforts, and I misinterpreted his response.

Communication, communication, communication. I need for my partner to keep me informed of where things move to. I need to be informed. I need to voice my frustration before it gets to boiling point. We both need to talk about our feelings more, and how each of our contributions to our home and our relationship make us feel, and how we interpret each others contributions. It is not a competition, but for many couples it feels like it.

When people feel guilt or stress, it leads them to act funny ways. Often stress and guilt are barriers to communication. The key to overcoming them is to recognize what it is, and have the courage to talk about it. You might be able to do it as a couple, or you might want the help of a friend who can listen to the way you are communicating with each other and offer insights and advice.

We got it sorted out, and kissed and hugged. It wouldn't hurt so much if I didn't feel such love at the same time. But it served as a good reminder to me. Sometimes you get so wrapped up in your own emotions that you forget to think of the other person. You also need to entertain the possibility that you are misinterpreting each other. Talking about it is the way to expose the miscommunication and let the healing begin.

A good lesson to learn, even for the experts!

About the Author

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