

“Huh, What Did You Say?”

by Mike Danchak

“Huh, what did you just say?” “You haven’t heard a word I said!”

Much of the time when our mate is talking, we are either planning what we are going to say back (this is generally the case when we disagree with what is being said) or our thoughts are on something that has nothing to do with what is going on at that moment (an article we read in the paper, the big game that’s coming up.)

Before you are able to communicate, carefully examine your attitude. Ask yourself, “I’m communicating to first understand my mate?” When your intention is to prove that “I’m right and you’re wrong,” you are simply positioning your comments to prove your spouse wrong and to get what you want. The end result is a stand off where you end up “butting heads.” As things heat up, the words are often filled with anger and blame. The verbal assault is an unconscious attempt to make your mate feel small, bad or inadequate and to give in to your demands.

To remedy this, you must make an intentional decision to hear what your spouse has to say (content) and to understand the feelings (emotions) driving their comments. Not only must you understand the content and feelings, but you must communicate to your spouse that you understand both what is being said and why. When this happens you connect with your spouse and build a bridge of mutual understanding, a bridge that you both can cross.

Communication Tip: Don’t Focus On Differences

Before you address the topic you are disagreeing over, put it in a larger context. Ask yourself, “What are we both interested in achieving?” You both agree to go on a relaxing vacation (this is your common purpose) but you disagree over the location. Spend time talking about what a “relaxing vacation” means to each of you. Make a common list and prioritize your items. Select the first five items on the list. These become your criteria for selection.

The above discussion must be conducted with a tone of mutual respect and honor. You deal with the problem by placing it in a larger context of a common purpose.

