

OPEN THE HEART WITH THIS KEY

by Mike Danchak

Listening to the heart might sound like a soppy, airy, emotional mantra, however it is a key to keeping intimacy alive in a marriage. When couples say they have a communication problem in their marriage they often mean ...”I never know what he/she is feeling. They never talk about or openly show their feelings...they aren’t concerned about how I feel.”

When you listen to your mates heart, you make it safe for them to share their fears, hopes, dreams, disappointments, and feelings. Some of the most intimate moments in a marriage are when both experience the freedom and security to share deep feelings without hearing, “You shouldn’t feel that way,” or “You’re too emotional,” or experiencing guilt because you are talking about how you feel.

Many are raised in families where it was not acceptable to talk about or share feelings and they carry this inhibition over into their marriages. When coaching couples, I give them the following skills to help them share and listen from the heart.

Step 1 Ask

Listening with Your Heart, is a relatively simple concept, but hard to do when you are overcome with anger, rejection, or just tired and preoccupied. The first step is to go forward and ask your mate what is going on. What has led them to being out of sorts, preoccupied, snappy, sullen or withdrawn?

Step 2 What are the feelings?

The second step involves listening to the words, and the feelings that go along with them. Notice the sadness, the tears and the worry. Imagine what it must be like for them. Don't interrupt, or defend your part in the situation and tell them how they should feel or what has led this to happen.

If you understand your mate’s perspective (they will let you know), then you have listened with your heart to their heart. Your spouse will feel more understood, cared for, and connected when you focus on their emotions and feelings, rather than merely on their words or thoughts.

Step 3 Acknowledge the feelings

The third step is to validate your spouse’s perspective. For example, I understand that..... Understanding doesn’t mean you agree or support their perspective, it means that you have listened. Never, never invalidate the way your spouse feels. When you invalidate their feelings it has the opposite effect of listening to the heart. They hear, “I don’t care how you feel and you are crazy for feeling the way you do..” When feelings

are disregarded it comes across to the spouse as a disrespectful judgment. When they hear this their heart is pierced—a sure way to kill intimacy!

1. Ask your spouse, “Do I listen to your heart?” When you ask the question, LISTEN to what your spouse says...follow the above guidelines...don’t get defensive. Another question to ask: “How do you need me to listen to you?”

2. Talk about how you can improve your ability to “listen to the heart” of your spouse. Make a mutual commitment to one another to listen more and talk less.