

The Messages We Send Without Saying a Word!

Have you ever been in a “heated discussion” (argument!) or an emotionally-charged attempt to resolve a conflict with your spouse and you are 100% certain that you never said what you are being accused of saying like I (Rick) have? Well, welcome to the world of “**Relational Messaging!**” Most couples blame their spouse for starting a conflict because they are unaware of the **Relational Message(s)** they sent and are waiting for their spouse to repent or apologize for how they were hurt by their spouse’s actions. In this posture of taking sides, very few conflicts are ever resolved, and love and peace are never completely restored to the relationship.

Part of the problem comes from the miscommunications that result from speaking different languages. You might be thinking, “But we both speak English; so how can that happen?” The reality is that men and women speak the same root language (English), but their words mean different things to them. The Eggerichs do a good job addressing this source of conflict and confusion in marriage conversations in their book *Cracking the Communication Code*. Understanding your spouse’s “code words” and actions will help you understand what they are really saying. Men speak “blue” and women speak “pink!” For example, Sue will say, “What would you like to do?” when what she means is, “I want you to take the lead or initiative in this decision.” When Sue is silent for any period of time, I know that she is either upset about something, or is waiting to see if or when I am going to say something again! I encourage you to get the book and spend some time observing and talking to each other about your “code words” and actions.

Besides the problems arising from misunderstanding in what He Said and She Said, there is another very powerful level of communication that goes beyond just the words being said or the actions being done. Underlying every verbal or written communication and all our actions (or lack of action) are the **Relational Messages** that are received and sent to each other. These nonverbal messages are the ones that affect our value, identity, and ability to trust each other. These messages usually produce very strong negative or positive emotional responses and build or destroy relationships. Studies have shown that somewhere around 93% of all communications are non-verbal (38% voice intonations and 57% body language). So we are communicating non-verbally all the time and not even aware of what messages we may be sending to the other person.

Most of us are totally unaware of the **Relational Messages** we are sending out until we begin to see or experience the responses from our spouse or other person. Men, more so than women who are more relationally sensitive, are blind to what message was sent and even more confused by the reaction they get back from the other person. I continue to be amazed at how many times I can impact Sue in some negative way when I had no intention of ever upsetting her. I may be just trying to help her do something or pointing out an easier way to accomplish the task she is doing and she takes it as a criticism or attack on her character or identity. There have been many times when I was just trying to be funny, and she took it the wrong way as an insult or criticism of her. I am also surprised sometimes in a positive way when I have said or done something that seems insignificant to me like spending some focused time with her or picking a bouquet of wildflowers, but it meant a lot to her and made her feel very loved.

Have you ever been in one of those discussions where you find yourself saying things like, “I never said that!” or “That’s not what I meant.” or “That’s not true!” or “All I was trying to do

was...(you fill in the rest).” Chances are you sent a **Relational Message** that you never intended to send. Another clue is if you said or did something for your spouse and got the opposite response from them than what you were expecting. The other person probably received a **Relational Message** from something that they picked up on in their own heart or that connected them to something from a past bad experience. Sometimes circumstances may cause you to send a relational message that you had no way of avoiding like being stuck in traffic and unable to contact your wife to let her know that you’re going to be late for dinner. She receives the **Relational Message** that you don’t love her any more or care about her.

The two areas where **Relational Messages** have the greatest positive or negative impact to a relationship are **Significance** for a man and **Security** for a woman. Dr. Lawrence Crabb in his book *The Marriage Builder* defines **Security** as an awareness of being unconditionally loved with no need to change to win love; love that is freely given and cannot be lost. **Significance** is having a responsibility or job that is truly important and whose results will last over time. A man needs to feel accepted, adequate, and a success and a woman needs to feel valuable and a high priority to her husband. **Relational Messages** that convey these two qualities will build a marriage, but the opposite or lack of conveying these qualities will start to destroy a marriage relationship.

If you find yourself sending the wrong **Relational Message** to your spouse, the only way to resolve the problem and get back on the love side of your relationship is to say these three words, **“I Was Wrong!”** Repentance and asking forgiveness for any negative **Relational Messages** is the quickest way to resolve the source of the conflict and mend the damage done. Even if you know you did nothing wrong or it was unintentional, it does not help to argue your “rightness.” It’s not about being right or wrong when it comes to **Relational Messages**. The fact is you sent a **Relational Message** and that needs to be cancelled through asking forgiveness and promising to do better the next time. At some point after the intensity or damage has been healed, it might be good to take some time and talk or journal about the issues that caused the **Relational Message** and learn how to avoid that kind of miscommunication again!

Dialogue Questions

1. What are some things that I can do to help you feel secure in our marriage and love for each other? How will each one of those things make you feel?
2. How can I help make you feel accepted, valued, and a high priority in my life? How does that make you feel?

Fun Date Night Ideas

1. Plan ahead and make love before you go to see a movie. Then go and enjoy the good feelings while you watch the movie together!
2. Lie next to each other or in each other’s arms and do synchronized breathing in the dark or candlelight. Both of you together take a deep breathe in through your nose using your diaphragm to fill your lungs as full as possible. Hold that breathe several seconds and then exhale through your mouth in unison. Do this 10 times or until you are fully relaxed. You can either fall asleep or enjoy more of the pleasures and delights of your love for each other!