

## Family Answer Book Marriage

# How to Talk So He'll Listen and Listen So He'll Talk

By Paul W. Schenk, Psy.D.

**W**hen you have a conversation with your husband, do you often feel as if he doesn't hear a word you say? Maybe that's because when you talk he's *looking*, not *listening*. Sounds strange, right? Emily thought so too the first few times she and her husband, Harry, came to see me for counseling. Their problem? When Emily spoke, Harry tuned out. At least that's how Emily saw it. As proof, she offered this anecdote: A few days before our initial session, she had asked Harry to get a can of spray paint from the basement. He went downstairs and returned a few minutes later carrying a tape measure. As he walked past her toward another part of the house, Emily asked, "Where are you going?" Harry told her he was going to fix something in another room. She looked at him in angry disbelief. Once again he'd forgotten to fulfill one of her requests. This type of behavior had been occurring for a while, and Emily was clearly frustrated.

Harry and Emily's problem isn't unusual. In fact, it's fairly common. If you're like most people, you probably can recall times when your spouse forgot to relay a phone message or pick up a carton of milk on his way home as you'd asked. An occasional goof can be excused or overlooked, but if these slip-ups seem frequent, you might begin to feel ignored, unimportant, unloved and resentful. Part of you wonders if he's doing this on purpose. Odds are he's not. It's



If you want your husband to really tune in when you talk, learn to speak his language.

simply a case of miscommunication.

Too often couples who don't communicate well never stop to consider what's truly causing the breakdown. When things don't go as planned, it's normal to make assumptions about what went wrong. But that can get you into trouble! Just because an assumption is logical doesn't mean it's true. Jim and Sandra, another couple I counseled, fell into this trap. While away on business, Jim promised to call home from his hotel at about 9:00 P.M., after a dinner meeting. When he hadn't called by 10:00, Sandra figured he'd forgotten. To her, that meant she wasn't important to him. Angry and hurt, she called Jim on his cell phone and let him have it. Turns out, the restaurant hadn't been able to seat Jim's group until well after their reser-

vation time, and he was still there. He had been so focused on the meeting that he hadn't noticed the time. Jim apologized, but the damage had already been done. All because Sandra made a faulty assumption.

## What's Your Language Style?

Each of us has his own way of communicating. Most people use a mix of three language styles: visual, auditory and kinesthetic. However, some of us rely heavily on just one of the three. Visual people file away information in their brain according to mental pic-

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“Couples communicate better when they're 'bilingual.'”

