12 Healthy Habits of Constructive Communicators

Wouldn't it be great if we could just blurt out whatever we want to say without repercussions? For our loved ones to auto-decipher what we mean from what we say, to give us the benefit of the doubt, and always agree with our point of view? If that's been your marital experience, please loan me your magic housecleaning elves for a few days as well. I have some chores they can help with.

For the rest of us, we know real life doesn't work that way, and that marriage is a continual lesson in communication. In A Wife's Secret to Happiness chapter five, we talk about a few constructive habits of healthy communicators. This bonus document fills out that list with a few more painful, but helpful, lessons I've learned over the years.

1. Using "I feel" instead of "You always/never" statements.

Unhealthy: "You never listen when I'm talking to you."

Healthy: "I feel like you're not listening when you start doing something else while I'm talking with you."

2. Asking for change versus demanding something different.

Unhealthy: "From now on, you need to take out the garbage on Monday night so you won't forget."

Healthy: "Is there something we can do differently to make sure we don't miss garbage pickup on Tuesday morning?"

3. Addressing the root issue instead of attacking the action.

Unhealthy: "I hate that you never remember my birthday."

Healthy: "When you forget my birthday, I feel like you don't cherish me as an important person in your life."

4. Setting unity as the goal not conformity.

Unhealthy: "This is my dream sofa, can't you please get on my page so we can make this purchase?"

Healthy: "I love how this sofa would look in our living room, but I don't want to pressure you into a purchase you're uncomfortable with."

5. Carefully selecting the timing of your conversation instead of hashing out hard conversations when you're both hungry, tired, sick, or trying to get other things done.

Unhealthy: "I know you're getting ready for bed but we really need to talk about family Christmas plans tonight."

Healthy: "We need to make some decisions for family Christmas plans this week. When would be a good time for us to talk?"

6. Repeating back what you heard instead of assuming you heard right and moving on.

Unhealthy: "I can't believe you'd say that. Well, let me tell you ..."

Healthy: "I heard you say that how I feel about this is too emotional, so you're disregarding my feelings. Is that right?"

7. Leaving room for thinking and listening instead of thinking ahead to your comeback statement.

Unhealthy: "—oh, you're going to go there?!" I can't wait to give him a piece of my mind about last Thanksgiving.

Healthy: [Listening.]

8. Explaining yourself a different way instead of just repeating the same thing. Unhealthy: "I keep saying that you hurt my feelings and you're not listening." Healthy: "Let me try explaining it another way. When you prioritize guy's night over date night with me, I feel like those friendships are more important to you than our relationship and that you expect to have more fun with them than you do with me."

Refusing to entertain hurtful words instead of dwelling on them or brainstorming ways to push your spouse's buttons.

Unhealthy: "Oh yeah?! Well everyone knows your hair plugs are fake." **Healthy:** "I'm getting emotional right now and don't want to say things just to hurt you. Let's take a break from this conversation and come back to it later."

10. Choosing to pause the conversation instead of talking it all out until you share every detail.

Unhealthy: "We'll discuss this until four in the morning if we have to." **Healthy:** "I'm feeling emotional and tired, which isn't helping my feelings stay in check. Can we pause this conversation until tomorrow?" Side note here: Ephesians 4 warns us not to let the sun go down while we're still angry. This doesn't mean you can't go to sleep, it means you need to choose not to be angry. Click here to read more about it on my blog.

11. Closing the conversation by affirming each other and your relationship instead of leaving feeling uncertain.

Unhealthy: "I just want to move on from this. It's fine." **Healthy:** "Thanks for talking through this with me. I feel like we're in a better place. How are you?"

12. Taking responsibility where you can and leaving the rest up to God instead of burdening yourself with finding the resolution or fix things solo.
Unhealthy: "If you'd just listen to me then we'd be fine. I have it all figured out."
Healthy: "I know this is a recurring issue for us. I am going to keep working on

this and will ask God for help."

Of all the recommendations above, #12 may be the most important. You can't fix your mate, and you're not intended to. Recognizing this brings freedom to your communication because the responsibility of conflict resolution, unity, and even mutual understanding is not all up to you. Do what you can and trust God. He is pleased with your efforts.