



Dear Life Coach Alex, my wife and I are unable to communicate effectively. Despite the efforts we make, our conversations still end up in arguments, with some of these arguments heated enough to make us not talk to each other for days! Please coach us on how to communicate effectively as a couple.

Thank you very much for bringing up this matter in our Life Coaching Corner. Your openness about your marital situation is exemplary. If people would only humble themselves and ask for help, their lives would be better; if couples would only seek the coaching and counseling to deal with their marital challenges, we would have fewer divorces, happier homes and more emotionally healthy children in our societies. The people who think it is a sign of weakness to seek marriage counseling will only wallow in pain because of their pride and ignorance.

Regardless of what eventually breaks up a marriage, be it consistent disrespect, unwavering distrust, adultery, unresolved malice, and financial stress, the primary root cause of all marital problems is ineffective communication. It is the inability of couples to effectively communicate with each other, their incapability to understand themselves. It is their withholding of valuable information from each other and the conscious or subconscious transmission of disrespect, distrust, disgust, anger and hatred through their body languages. If one or both couples feel unheard in a marriage, that marriage is heading for divorce, for until your spouse understands where you are coming from, he or she would be skeptical about joining you there. This is why effective communication is an imperative for success in marriage, and in life.

Communication is the act of imparting, transmitting, exchanging or conveying information, thoughts, and opinions through speech, writing, body language or signs. Communication may be spoken or unspoken, or transmitted manually or electronically. In a marriage, if a husband is keeping malice with his wife, he is communicating anger towards her; if a wife consistently interrupts her husband when he is speaking, she is communicating disrespect towards him; when a wife refuses to make love to her husband, she is communicating selfishness towards him.

The topmost things we should be communicating in our marriages by our words and actions are appreciation for our spouse, self-accountability, apologies for our shortcomings, and love as outlined in Apostle Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails".

Whether we are awake or asleep, talking or silent, we are consistently communicating something to those around us. If you are one of those who come home from work, grab a beer and put yourself in front of the TV or computer all evening without raising a finger to assist your family in any way, shape or form, you are basically telling them that they are not important to you, that you deserve all the relaxation you can get at the expense of family time because you, and you only, work so hard. You are telling them that you don't care about their day and whatever challenges they may have. By saying nothing, you have said a lot. By doing nothing, you have done even much more. Action does speak louder than words.

Communication ends up in argument mainly because of the unspoken words, which is inline with what communication experts say – that our body language accounts for most of our communication. Regardless of how polite you may sound, it is your body language that would either appease or anger your spouse. Look at it this way: If your wife is trying to convey something to you and your body language is telling her that you are not interested or that she seems to goof all the time, that conversation is headed for an argument. If you are defensive when your spouse seeks an apology from you, or you give apologies in words while your body language indicates unremorseful heart, that conversation is doomed.

From my own personal experience and that of coaching husbands and wives on how to communicate effectively in their marriages, I have learnt that with a conscious effort and the willingness to consistently practice effective strategies, anyone can become an effective communicator – whether in their marriage, parenting, leadership, business, school or relationships. Yes, Barack Obama may be a natural, but that does not mean we can't be better at it.

Some of the key words required to make your communication more effective are humility, patience, openness, understanding and gentleness. If you are humble enough to accept what you may presume to be an attack on your personality, patient enough to gather more information, and open enough to accept differences of opinions, then you will be better equipped to communicate effectively, which in essence, is to convey your response in a gentle manner.

Here are three irrefutable ways to communicate effectively, and avoid arguments in your marriage:

- 1. Listen Attentively** – One of the most disrespectful human habits is to interrupt others while they are still speaking. While this may be rampant in some cultures, it is rude, inconsiderate, selfish and arrogant. And subduing your spouse to this habit is outright wickedness. Listening is way more than just hearing what is being said. It is the conscious act of assimilating spoken and unspoken information with the genuine intention of gaining full understanding of what is being conveyed. To improve in this area, learn to always paraphrase information and gently ask your spouse to confirm your understanding. According to the book of Proverbs, **“Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him. He who answers before listening— that is his folly and his shame.”**
- 2. Pursue Understanding** – According to Stephen Covey, in his very popular book, “The 7 Habits of a Highly Effective Person”, we should always seek first to understand, before seeking to be understood. This is extremely important in a very sensitive partnership like marriage, for how would you expect to be understood when you have not conveyed understanding. To improve in this area, learn to always ask the questions that would make your spouse provide you with more information so you may gain the understanding that is necessary to respond properly. According to the book of Proverbs, **“Good understanding wins favour, but the way of the unfaithful is hard. Folly delights a man who lacks judgment, but a man of understanding keeps a straight course.”**
- 3. Speak Lovingly** – This is often the hardest to practice, because as humans, we tend to retaliate when our ego is bruised, when we feel (verbally) attacked; however, to foster an effective communication requires that you speak lovingly at all times. Your marriage depends on it. You may have listened attentively and even have complete understanding of what your spouse was saying, but when you do not “speak the truth in love”, as advised by Apostle Paul, you will bring calamity upon yourself. Your conversations will end up in argument, and sooner or later, your marriage will end up in divorce. To improve in this area, always take a deep breath before responding, sometimes counting a minimum of 6 seconds in your head to allow the information travel past your amygdala (the emotional part of your brain) to your neo-cortex (the thinking part of your brain). According to the book of Proverbs, **“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.”**

Dear readers, I may not have enough information about your particular situation to provide the coaching that specifically addresses the communication challenges in your marriage; however, your marriage will definitely get better if you practice these communication strategies wholeheartedly and consistently. And inline with His promise to prosper us and not to fail us, God will bless whatever effort you make.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank those of you who send us issues to write about, as well as those who contact us for more information about our articles. You are all heroes and heroines, for it takes humility, courage and a strong desire for a better marriage to defile the cultural stigma of being silent when faced with marital challenges.

If you require coaching in a specific area of your life or business, or would like this message delivered in the form of a keynote, workshop or seminar at your workplace, church, organization or community event, or to share your much-appreciated feedback, send an email to alex.ihama@TheExhortation.com or call +1 (416) 902-6672.



Alex Nosa Ihama is a Life, Business and Executive Coach, who has been facilitating Marriage, Parenting, Career and Leadership workshops and seminars for years. Either face-to-face, or through the phone and email, he has personally coached hundreds of people worldwide and thousands more through his website, www.TheExhortation.com. This is in addition to his countless motivating and inspirational articles and newsletters that are now received in over 80 countries.

Alex strongly believes that the key to success, which he defines as contentment, is in the hands of each individual regardless of his or her situation and circumstance. This is the fundamental statement upon which he founded the three organizations. For more information, visit his website, www.TheExhortation.com.