

5 Essential Levels of Communication for Your Marriage

Almost every time my wife and I speak at a marriage retreat, I share a story from early on in our marriage where we had a drawn-out communication failure. The result of the failure ended in a blow-up in which I left our home and wasn't sure when I'd come back.

We couldn't communicate, I couldn't take it, so I couldn't stay there. Fortunately, we had some close friends who intervened by coming to our apartment, waiting for me to return home and committing to not leaving until we were able to begin some healthy communication and start the process of working through it together.

I learned about the five levels of communication and discovered where we were getting stuck. The goal for your communication should be to get as deep as you can. This will lead to a stronger connection and intimacy. Here are the five levels of communication:

5. Common conversation. This is the lowest level. You don't really share anything at this level. These are conversations you'd have with anybody, even strangers. Things like "How are you?" "The weather is great today." There is no depth at this level, but it has a place.

4. Nightly news. You share what you know about something—your day, what happened with the kids, etc. Your conversation is similar to the nightly news, primarily reporting the facts. Your conversation has gone just beyond common, which gives you things to talk about, but you can't stay here. An example is sharing how your workday went, how the kids did, what's for dinner or what somebody shared on Facebook. This is where my

wife and I spent a lot of our time in communication. We'd go beyond common communication, but not by much.

3. Cautious disclosure. You cautiously share your opinions, your ideas and your judgments. You reveal some but not all of you. As you share, you carefully watch your spouse, and if you sense any bit of question or rejection, you abandon the conversation and close up eliminating your chance to get below the surface. You may bring up the fact that you'd like to spend more time golfing or fishing with the fellas, or you want to spend the next holiday with your family, or how the big vacation you've discussed may not be the best thing right now. This is where we got stuck and just couldn't seem to get past it. We weren't willing to risk anything due to past repercussions, or we just wanted to stay in our comfort zones.

2. High-risk/High-reward talks. Now you've done it. Feelings can be hurt when you expose yourselves to this depth. But you must do this. If not, your marriage won't grow. This is where you share things about yourself, your spouse, your marriage or your life that your wife may not agree with or that may lead to hurt. This could range from wanting to discipline your kids in a different way to how the lack of a budget for your money is leading the family into a financial hole.

1. Truth-in-love talks. This is where you are completely open and honest with your wife—total transparency. Sharing the real you. It means truthfully sharing your heart—your doubts, your fears, your insecurities, your struggles. It means lovingly sharing your feelings about your wife: your frustrations, concerns and hurts. You are now able to share anything and everything with your wife. If she's developed some unhealthy habits, you are able to honestly share those with her without condemnation. If you are concerned with the way your work or your marriage is going, you can talk to her about it. You trust and she trusts that you have each other's best interests at heart and you're committed to talking through anything that comes up.

To get to level 1, you must develop deep trust, commitment and friendship. Each depth of communication enables you to do so. The first question to ask: At what level are you communicating now?

With each conversation, be attentive to your level of communication. Then consciously go a level deeper. Much like lifting weights, you start with lightweights, then you increase, and eventually you've built the strength to lift heavy weights or, in this case, have Level One communication in your marriage. {eoa}

Jackie Bledsoe is an author, blogger and speaker, but first and foremost a husband and father of three who helps men better lead and love the ones who matter most. For the original article, visit .