

Questions to Ask When Your Spouse Wants You to Change

In any healthy marriage, there's a lot of truth to the notion that we want and need to be accepted by our spouse, warts and all, just as we are. After all, every lasting marriage seems to find a way to survive some annoying personality traits that never seem to change.

But sometimes we can use "you should just accept and love me as I am" as a cop-out. We confuse our personality with our behavior, assuming that our habits are just a part of who we are rather than something that could be changed or ended.

So what do you do when your spouse clearly wishes—or expects—that you change something?

Here are some things to think about and ask yourself:

Is this desired change about a part of my personality or a behavior that may be influenced by my personality? I'm not a psychologist, but I think of personality as who we are and behavior as what we do. And, of course, behavior is influenced by personality.

I have a somewhat dominant and sometimes aggressive personality. Susan has pointed out to me, on many occasions, that I need to be a more patient and passive driver. Is that asking me to change my personality or to alter my behavior? I could tell her that I can't change and that is just how I drive, but that would be a cop-out. Although my impatience may be influenced by how I'm wired, I can certainly do something about my driving habits. I am working on it.

We should be careful not to assume that a desired change in behavior is an attack on our personality. Sure, our personality may determine whether a change in our behavior is

easy or difficult, but we should avoid confusing the two.

How important is this desired change to my spouse? If your spouse has a laundry list of things they wish you did differently, ask them to rank each one on an urgency scale from 1 to 10. Notice which ones are an 8 or 9 or 10 to them and then focus just on those things.

By the way, a list filled with nothing but 10's from your spouse is simply not grounded in reality. Try to get to the bottom of which desired changes are most important to your spouse and why.

What am I communicating if I am, or am not, willing to change for my spouse? When we are unwilling to even try to change a behavior or habit for our spouse, we may be communicating to them that we really don't care or value what they want or think. But a willingness to change can communicate lots of good things such as we are trying to understand what's important to our spouse, we are trying to better our relationship, and that we love our spouse.

How might my willingness to change affect my spouse? Leo Tolstoy once said, "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." When we show a willingness to change something about our behavior, we model something important to our family and the people around us.

Change is possible. Change can be good. Change can start with me. And perhaps our willingness to change can inspire our spouses to be willing to change some things that are important to us.

How do you react when your spouse wants you to change something? What has helped you make changes in your life for the better? Please share your comments.

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