

How Sarcasm and Snark Can Destroy a Marriage

Like many men, I have the gifts of sarcasm and snark. Okay, maybe they aren't really *gifts*, but I've got them and they work when I'm with my buddies at the gym or mountain biking or hanging out. I'm always good for a witty comment followed by some friendly chuckles.

In three decades of marriage, it's taken focus and hard work (amid many failures) to restrain these gifts in the presence of my wife, Cathy. Any time I "express these gifts" it hasn't been good for our marriage.

Cathy tells me that from time to time I spill and leave protein powder on our kitchen counter after I've made a post-workout shake. She has eyes like a hawk, I swear. One day she remarked on the mess I left behind and her desire for me to clean up after myself. I was amazed at how quickly my mind concocted a fantastic zinger in response.

My thoughts were along the lines of how miniscule the powder on the counter was compared to her piles of junk on the counter, and how I believed that a family of armadillos had already taken up residence among them. Wow! I was impressed with my skills.

Fortunately, a wave of sanity rolled over me and I suppressed the urge to speak what I was thinking. Instead, I apologized and told Cathy that I would be more careful in the future and better at cleaning up after myself (which was a totally reasonable request).

It's just so easy for husbands to default to sarcasm and snark when your wife points out your error or careless act. But your sarcasm and wit can damage your wife and your marriage in moments like this.

The good news is that you don't have to be the king of snark. Really. It will take a good measure of self-control and practice, but here are three skills you can learn to make yourself a hero in her eyes:

1. Don't say everything you think. Just because you think it, doesn't mean you have to say it. It sounds simple, but it's tougher to follow thru than you might imagine. Try it! Keep that comment to yourself—you won't explode.

2. Keep your body language in check. You may have mastered the art of the eye-roll instead of using witty retorts, but your body language can convey messages that are just as damaging as hurtful remarks.

3. Schedule a weekly summit. Essentially a summit is a meeting with your wife to discuss family and relationship issues. This provides you an alternative to saying something in the heat of the moment that you'll likely regret, while providing regular opportunities for important conversations.

You can change this behavior and change your marriage. Don't allow your remarks to cause nasty effects in your wife, like defensiveness, anger, and shame. You never win that way in your marriage. Snark and sarcasm communicate a lack of respect and reinforce any notions she may already have that you are a jerk. Don't be a jerk ... be her hero ... the one she's been waiting for.

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