

Why Do Spouses Sometimes Remember Things Differently?

One of the fun parts about getting to know a new couple is learning about how they first met. It's because, invariably, you don't get to hear just one story. You get to hear two: his and hers.

That's certainly true for my wife, Susan, and me. Our recollection of the details surrounding how we first met are a bit different. She says that I came to an event at her Alpha Delta Pi sorority house at University of Florida because I had my eye on one of the other girls there. My version is a bit different.

I went to her sorority house that evening not because I had someone particular in mind, but because I figured that a house full of young women was about as good a place a young man could spend an evening as you might find.

Shortly after I arrived, I saw this cute, sparkling, smiling brunette taking part in a ladies barbershop quartet. It was part of the show that the ladies were putting on, and I just knew that I needed to get to know her.

Remembering fun things like this differently doesn't really matter in the big scheme of things. But conflicting memories can be important when you're dealing with events and situations that go deeper. Maybe you and your spouse have different accounts of an awkward situation at a family gathering and, as a result, can't decide how to deal with it.

Or, you don't agree on the outcome of a serious conversation about what to do with a rebellious teenager. What do you do when you want to be on the same page, but seem to be reading different scripts?

Assume Best Intent

Don't blurt, "That's not true!" or "You're wrong." By doing so, you are essentially calling your partner a liar or putting them on the defensive. Remember, two people can witness the same event and have different accounts. It happens sometimes with witnesses in court cases. Different does not necessarily mean someone is lying or wrong.

Keep in mind too that if it's an issue concerning the two of you, neither of you is coming to it devoid of feelings. Their emotions may have colored what they remember, but the same is true for you too. Presume they have good intentions and are not just trying to make you look bad.

Accept Your Differences

While the angle from which we see things affects the way we interpret them, the brains of men and women also process information differently. There's a reason men tend to be "silo" thinkers, able to separate issues one from another; while, for women, everything is interrelated like one giant flow chart. Men and women perceive and process things differently. Our mental "computers" don't run the exact same software.

In their helpful book *His Brain, Her Brain: How Divinely Designed Differences Can Strengthen Your Marriage*, Dr. Walt and Barb Larimore explain how the two sexes are simply wired quite differently. Drawing from scientific research, they examine the ways in which male and female brains develop and function uniquely and how their essential chemistry differs from each other.

Address the Issue

Don't get lost in the disputed facts. Sure, there will be times when someone's memory is not just different, but wrong and in a way that matters. If one of you failed to pay the

mortgage in time, it may be important to clear up who dropped the ball so that you can both be sure it doesn't happen again.

Sometimes couples remember things differently because one or both are not really listening or with their full attention. As a result, the person only hears part of what was said and thus has a different recollection of the facts. That's why listening well to one another is so important.

The main point in addressing differing memories is not which version of events is the right. It's not about winning an argument. The goal should be to try to understand why your partner recalls things the way he or she does and what that means for you both going forward. Always ask yourself, "What's more important, being right or the relationship?"

For more on resolving issues well, read my "8 Secrets of Conflict Resolution."

What has been your experience of remembering things differently than your spouse? Share how have you learned to deal with this area of potential conflict.

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