

Understanding Misunderstanding

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Have you ever felt that you and your partner were on completely different pages?

Have you ever thought, “How can our perspectives be so different?” Many couples face these questions throughout their relationship, and the truth is, these differences aren't bad. However, miscommunication can be, especially when it leads to feelings of resentment. Now you may think, “What’s the difference?” The difference is that while having diverse experiences and frames of reference is natural and healthy, miscommunication often plants seeds of conflict and creates distance in a relationship.



So, what is the root of miscommunication? In the book, *Fighting for Your Marriage*, the authors present the culprit of miscommunication as what they termed a ‘filter.’ Much like the filters you find on Snapchat, filters in relationships alter or distort the lens of our perception. They stated,

Where Do Filters Come From?

Everyone comes with a mix of diverse experiences, and every couple represents a unique melting pot of family dynamics, ethnicity, nationality, religion, values and beliefs. While you may be mostly aware of your spouse's ideologies and perceptions, it's easy to be unaware of the effects that these differences have on our communication.

A friend of mine explained a miscommunication that occurred between a husband and wife from two different countries.

Susan was from the Dominican Republic and her husband Adam was from the Western United States. They had a happy marriage and chose to raise their children in the U.S. In their early parenting years they became aware of a difference in how they perceived the tumbles of their small children. When a child fell Susan became extremely worried over the child's wellbeing. In contrast, Adam felt that his wife's reaction was over exaggerated. In his mind his wife was dramatizing something small and inconsequential.



Later in their marriage, their small family took a trip to visit the Dominican Republic. Upon arrival, Adam noticed the large amount of concrete that existed most everywhere--on the street, inside of homes, etc. It was at that moment he realized why his wife's reaction had been so extreme. Falling on concrete put a child at high risk of serious injury. His wife was responding to something that had been consequential in her experience.

Susan and Adam's misunderstanding is a classic example of two experiences that didn't offer a shared perspective. It would've been easy for Susan to believe that Adam didn't care as much about their child's wellbeing as she did, and it would've been easy for Adam to maintain the opinion that Susan was overprotective. It was only when Adam could see Susan's perspective that this misunderstanding was resolved.

Spotting a Filter

So how can you recognize filters as they arise? It can be as simple as slowing down. Your spouse isn't your enemy, in fact, they are your greatest ally and it's important to remember that they want you to be on their side just as much as you want them to be on yours. While it can be difficult to recognize your own filters as well as your partners there are certain questions you can ask yourself or discuss with your partner to enhance mutual understanding and to encourage an open dialogue.

1. Have I discussed this expectation openly and clearly with my partner?

Many couples make the mistake of assuming that their partner knows exactly what they are thinking. An expectation unspoken is an expectation that you shouldn't expect. Make sure to be clear with your spouse about what is important to you. It is unfair to ask your partner to read your mind.

2. How is my mood affecting my perception of this situation?

Have you ever heard of the term 'hangry?' Many people will admit that it's harder to be pleasant on an empty stomach. A bad day at work, or a sleepless night can drastically affect your perception. It's important in these moments of mood inspired irritation to consider how these emotional, mental, and physical factors are influencing your behavior. This will empower you to take your mood by the horns and prevent it from bulldozing your partner. Remember to share these factors with your partner. This way, they really can fulfill their role as your greatest ally.

3. Will this still yield a positive result?



As you know, sometimes people do things differently than you do--and that's okay! Many couples often confuse their method as the best one, when in reality, these differences are a blessing. They present an opportunity for learning and teaching in your relationship. Your partner will do

things differently, and those differences can create a better solution than you both had in the beginning. Celebrate these successes with your spouse--even if the means of achieving them were different from your own.

4. Is pride playing a role in this miscommunication?

Lastly, you should always ask yourself if pride is preventing you from resolving a miscommunication. If your best excuse for staying angry is over petty particulars, then pride is in play. Humility is possibly your greatest asset in uncovering filters and mending miscommunication. Humility will lead to caring more for your partner's wellbeing and your success as a couple than the fleeting gratification of being 'right.'

The Promise

As you slow down and commit to identifying the filters within your relationship, your respect and understanding of one another will grow. This will also convert you and your spouse into better communicators AND thus, better listeners.

As you strive to prevent filters from damaging your relationship your individual perspectives will undergo the transformation from mine to ours. The communication that ensues will be a conduit to understanding one another more intimately, aligning your mutual dreams, and strengthening the love and commitment you have to each other.