

Small Talk

This will be a very brief chapter. Its' brevity, however, is by no means indicative of its' import.

We live in an incredibly busy world. When we are out and about we see people rushing here and there in a big hurry. Moreover, America has become a **Me First Culture**. That is, we want to be first in line, first to talk, first to get everywhere and everything, and we want the focus to be on us, not someone else. We are conditioned by our culture to compete. In synchronicity with our competitive culture, we have become a nation of talkers vs. listeners. Most of us need to compete to gain and maintain the stage, i.e. to be heard at all. While all of us are talking, we wonder, "is anybody listening?"

When we come home at night to our partner we are tired. Often both husband and wife work demanding jobs since it takes two incomes to support the lifestyles to which we are accustomed. In the evening it's all too easy for us to become mindless, or "mind dead". We acquiesce to stress, collapse, and mindlessly waste the little time we have to talk, filling these opportune moments with television, the internet, or mindless chatter on the telephone. At the end of the evening we fall asleep, get up the next day, and do it all over again. In so doing, we fall into parallel, disconnected lives, anesthetized by our expensive technological toys. We work to pay for the toys, and the toys cut us off from each other.

Add children to the mix and we have even less time for each other. Compounding the problem, we are so out of practice, when we do try to catch up, we go about the process poorly. The few times we do talk, we compete for the stage, creating very unsatisfying conversations that lead to even less talking and listening. It's a vicious cycle of work, stress, kids, technology and competition. Consequently, our relationships get short shrift, and become very dissatisfying. We then turn to others outside our relationship to meet our vital needs for connection.

Not talking, as the remainder of this book indicates, is deadly to intimacy. While many men can feel connected through context (simply by being in the same room with their mate), women need talk, or dialogue to feel connected. Talk between intimates accomplishes two basic purposes. Talk is the way in which we a) identify and solve problems, and b) establish and maintain intimate connections.

Studies concerning extra-marital affairs now indicate not only that as many wives are having affairs as husbands. This research also indicates that most wives who are

having affairs are doing so because they have discovered a man with whom they can have satisfying conversations.

Small talk means many things, but in its' simplest form, small talk is talking about anything and everything. During the day, when we are working in our separate worlds, we have radically different experiences. In order to be connected, we need to share at least the most meaningful of these happenings in our lives. Sharing talk about our separate worlds may not seem very important on any given day, but taken as a whole it is extremely important. Why? As mentioned earlier, women need to talk to feel intimately connected. Moreover, in a sexual relationship, talk, if done in the right way, is an aphrodisiac for women.

A good talking partner for a woman is like a good dancing partner. When we dance, we switch leads. This is particularly true when partners reverse position, one partner dancing backward and another dancing forward. In good small talk one partner leads, and the other follows. Then it reverses. In good conversation both partners are talking in synchronicity, each feeling gracefully connected to the other.

Do you have enough small talk in your relationship? If so, what is it like? Would you describe it like dancing, or would it be more like competing? In order to promote intimacy, small talk must occur, on a regular basis, and it must be satisfying. If you are serious about establishing true intimacy, do the following two exercises.

Exercise One

1. Sit down in a quiet place together.
2. Engage in a problem-solving discussion. Your problem is a) what times can we set aside, on a daily basis, to engage in small talk? And b) what do we need to do to protect these times?
3. Come to a clear consensus. Establish your plan, and put it into effect.
4. During your small talk sessions, keep a running analysis of how well you are accomplishing both "a" and "b". Make amendments to your plan where necessary.

Exercise Two

1. Practice your small talk.
2. Take an agreed upon amount of time (say 15 minutes) for a conversation.
3. Approach your conversation like a dance, switching leads between talker and listener.
4. Talk about anything. Try to share and understand your separate worlds.

5. When the time is up, take a few minutes to evaluate your talk. Evaluate it as if you had been dancing. How well did you switch leads? Did it feel like you were dancing together, in synchronicity? Do you need to change your pace? Who needs to lead more, and who needs to lead less?
6. Do this exercise over and over, at different points in time, until the two of you can agree that you have become good dancers, and have no trouble getting into step with each other.