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life advice

Mentally Prepare to Improve Communication with Your Spouse

Learn how mental rehearsal can help you and your spouse communicate more effectively.

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May 2011



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Visualizing how your conversation will unfold will improve the real thing.

When you're up against a potential relationship disrupter with things like: having to tell your spouse about a really awful financial situation, you got fired because you finally told your boss your real feelings about her, or the IRS came knocking because of some awful goof you made; your first reaction is to go into survival mode. Immediately.

Whether you realize it or not, your body and mind automatically go into "fight or flight" prep. That means you are now scanning the environment for any and all possible dangers, traps and threats to your survival. Not just about the financial situation, but relative to your fears and anxieties about having to break some uncomfortable news to your spouse.

When you're in "fight or flight," you're in no position to have a comfortable, successful discussion about unpleasant issues with your beloved. Yet that is exactly what you need to have if you're to get through a tough time with the support and loving help of your spouse.

Do what Olympic athletes do. Be the pro they are in their respective sport, but instead apply it in your relationship. Engage the power of mental rehearsal. Time and time again these athletes have demonstrated the enormous power of getting their mental self, their subconscious self, lined up with their goals before they compete.

Here's how to use these mental skills:

1. Sit or lie down in a quiet spot where you will not be interrupted. Loosen any clothes that are tight, take off your glasses (if you wear them) and your watch. Make yourself pleasantly comfortable. Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and then relax all your muscles. Start at your feet and work your way to your head, one muscle group at a time. Then take a nice deep breath and relax your muscles from the top of your head back down to the bottom of your feet.

2. In this relaxed state, take another deep breath. Now start to visualize in your mind the situation you will be in. For example, see yourself sitting with your spouse, make a mental image of yourself calm and happy, feeling good about yourself and the discussion you're about to have. Feel strong and self-confident, even excited about the discussion. See yourself talking to your spouse in a firm yet positive manner.

3. See your mate *responding* to you with equal positiveness, respect and enthusiasm in resolving the situation. During the entire visualization, be sure to really *feel* the desired emotions as vividly as you can. Engaging your emotions is the key to a successful mental rehearsal. Visualize your spouse on your side, understanding your concerns, having ideas that are mutually beneficial. See yourself ending the discussion happy and satisfied. See you and your spouse closer and happier together because of the success of your discussion. Feel the happiness and joy of success flood your whole being.

The more anxiety-provoking the situation, the more time should be given to your "rehearsal." Begin rehearsing a week ahead of time if possible and at least once a day before a particularly scary event. But, even only a single session of mental rehearsal the night before a situation will be extremely helpful. Doing visualizations before sleep works particularly well.

If you're in a bind and you have literally just a few minutes before a potentially worrisome interaction, take a few moments in a private area to close your eyes and quickly rehearse the situation in the way you want it to be resolved.

Mental rehearsal can make the difference between feeling confident about what you're doing, versus being insecure and worried about the chances of your success. Mental rehearsal reinforces your qualities and strong points, boosts your self-confidence and self-esteem and helps you think creatively. It helps keep all parts of you—conscious, subconscious and unconscious—on the same track by focusing your thoughts and emotions on one thing: success.

Remember though, the magic of mental rehearsal is not to be substituted for thorough preparation and "knowing your stuff." Mental rehearsal cannot invent what is not there. If you have not thought through what you want to say or do, there is nothing to rehearse. This being said, when you put excellent preparation together with mental rehearsal, success can be easily and readily yours.

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