

Inside Relationships by Jan Denise

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Men Don't Say Anything, They Just Leave

You anxiously open an e-mail from a friend you haven't heard from since she got married six months ago. It pokes fun at men ... and contradicts all that giggling praise you heard about her "shining star." Why do we shift our focus from what we're grateful for to what irritates us? Often we're complaining about such petty things as toilet seats and toothpaste caps!

Once we get what we want — the shining star — we want more. He begins to seem ordinary, not because he has changed, but because he hasn't. We decide he should twinkle from more angles or change colors now and then.

You have to decide if you want to keep trying to satisfy your insatiable ego or satisfy your heart. Keep in mind that what you don't appreciate has a way of slipping through your fingers. Remember the skin you didn't take care of, the opportunities you took for granted, or the friend you thought would always be there? They're gone.

"Women complain, men leave," says Noelle C. Nelson, Ph.D., author of "Your Man Is Wonderful." If you're thinking that nothing could drive your man away, you might ask yourself if he's still there emotionally. As Nelson explains, they don't necessarily leave physically. Women tend to speak up loudly about what's wrong; men tend to simply bow out.

That probably brings to mind those times he's walked away in the middle of an argument. Maybe you can even see that how-dare-you look on your face as you caught up with him (he can, too).

You know from your own experience that men don't like to ask for help —they don't even want to ask for directions. Neither do they like to fall short of what you want, let alone of what you expect. And when they do, they often withdraw. That doesn't mean they won't get back on the horse, but be careful of beating them up regularly. It's not nice; and it doesn't get you what you want.

If you notice what's positive — he works hard, plays with the kids or cooks for you — and say thank you, he'll think he has a shot at pleasing you.

He wants to please you, but when it feels like he can't, he's apt to leave. And what you really want is his presence.

You want him to see you, hear you, understand you and back you up. You want him to care. Give him what *you* want.

Shift your focus to what you can appreciate. And when you can't seem to appreciate what *he* appreciates, try to understand it. When Sam used to tell me he was going out to mow the meadow, it didn't seem important to me. I wanted him to stay with me! I love the meadow and I swing in the meadow, but I really had no concept of what would happen if you didn't mow the meadow.

Give your sweetheart the benefit of the doubt. Assume that he has a viable viewpoint and knows more than you do about "meadows." When you don't get it, ask questions — instead of making accusations or fueling your resentment. Act like you're on the same team with the same goals.

Then when you have a suggestion, you can present it in a constructive way. And he can, in the spirit in which it was offered, receive it.

When you give your attention to what you are grateful for, you nurture it. You also help to make the relationship feel safe, safe enough to open up emotionally rather than withdrawing. Then the star begins to twinkle, twinkle, twinkle.

Perhaps the most ordinary thing about him — and you — is his sensitivity to rejection. Don't fall into the trap of trying to feed your ego by shooting holes in his. Get involved on a deeper level and feed each other's spirits.

Shine together!

Jan Denise is a columnist, author of the just released "Innately Good: Dispelling the Myth That You're Not" and "Naked Relationships," speaker and consultant based in McIntosh, Fla. Please e-mail her at jandenise@nakedrelationships.com, or visit her website at www.nakedrelationships.com. To find out more about Jan Denise, and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate website at www.creators.com.

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