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life advice

Use Your Differences as Relationship-Builders

3 ways to accept your spouse's differences.

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Try to embrace the differences in your relationship, they can work to build a stronger marriage.

You do the laundry. You don't mind doing the laundry. It's kind of a relaxing thing for you. You drift and think about your day, think about how you're going to resolve that situation at work tomorrow, remember a funny thing you heard on the radio earlier, as you pull a load out of the dryer, fold it and begin sorting another load.

"Why are you doing it that way?" your husband asks. "Huh?" you respond, still in your quasi-meditative sorting-laundry state. "Why are you sorting the darks that way?" he asks, more insistent now. "I don't know," you say, staring down at an uneven pile of dark socks and black T-shirts. "I've always sorted laundry this way."

"Well that's dumb," he continues, "You should do it this way," and in no time at all, you are in the middle of a "my way is better" argument in which each of you is trying to convince the other of the best way to sort darks.

In another scenario your husband may be scheduling bill payment on the internet. You think, "That's a dumb way to do that." You say to him, "You shouldn't schedule the bills to get paid all at once, do it this way." And once again, in no time at all, you find yourself in yet another "my way is better than your way" argument, which leaves both of you unhappy and upset with each other for the rest of the day.

What's going on here? What's the problem?

Well, let's face it. Each and every one of us thinks our way is better. As a matter of fact, each and every one of us thinks it should be obvious to everybody else that our way is better. Now that wouldn't cause problems if we would keep our opinion of our "better" way to ourselves. But we don't. More often than not, especially with husbands and wives, we take up the cause of "my way is better" and try to force our righteousness onto our 'til-death-do-us-partner.

If someone asks you for your help or advice—if you are in a teaching position relative to them (instructor, supervisor, boss), or if you are functioning in a professional capacity where advice is what's sought (accountant, manager, dentist, doctor, counselor, etc.), it's totally appropriate to argue the advisability of your approach. But when you're just going about your married life, dishing out "my way is better" to your spouse on a regular basis, about anything and everything, you're setting yourself up for an unhappy and potentially very damaged relationship.

One of the keys to happy healthy relationships is acceptance and appreciation of difference. One of the hardest things for humans to do is accept and appreciate our differences. No wonder many of us find marriage far more challenging than expected! Yet an appreciation of the differences between you and your spouse is doable when you keep the following guidelines in mind.

1. Different is just that—different. Different is not better or worse. Different is just different.
2. People do things in different ways, go about things differently, approach life differently because these ways work for them. These may not be the most efficient, smart or elegant ways to go about life from your perspective, just as how your way to go about life may not be the most efficient, smart or elegant ways from someone else's perspective.
3. Observe. Pay attention to how your husband/wife goes about their life. Ask questions. Explore the how and why of this particular approach and recognize that this way of doing things works for them. Seek to understand rather than to criticize.

Be willing to accept that there are many ways of going about the "doing" of life, and yours is only one of them. The satisfaction level in your marriage will increase exponentially.

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