

5.2 Disrespectful Judgments

When requests don't get you what you want, and demands don't work either, our instincts and habits often provide us with another controlling and abusive strategy -- disrespectful judgments. Without a doubt, demands are abusive, but disrespectful judgments often make demands seem merciful in comparison.

In the final analysis, disrespectful judgments represent an effort to force our spouses to give us what we want in marriage, but it's often cleverly disguised. Instead of making an outright demand, we present our problem as if it were really our spouse's personal shortcoming. We try to "straighten out" our spouse in an effort to get our way.

At the time we rationalize our disrespect by convincing ourselves that we're doing our spouses a big favor, to lift them from the darkness of their confusion into the light of our superior perspective. If they would only follow our advice, we tell ourselves, they could avoid many of life's pitfalls--and we would also get what we want.

A disrespectful judgment occurs whenever one spouse tries to impose a system of values and beliefs on the other. When a husband tries to force his point of view on his wife, he's just asking for trouble. When a wife assumes that her own views are right and her husband is woefully misguided -- and tells him so -- she enters a minefield.

In most cases, a disrespectful judgment is simply a sophisticated way of getting what one spouse wants from the other. But even when there are the purest motives, it's still a stupid and abusive strategy. It's stupid because it doesn't work, and it's abusive because it causes unhappiness. If we think we have the right -- even the responsibility -- to impose our view on our spouses, our efforts will almost invariably be interpreted as personally threatening, arrogant, rude, and incredibly disrespectful. That's when we make sizable withdrawals from the Love Bank.

How can you know if you're a perpetrator of disrespectful judgments? The simplest way to find out is to ask your spouse. But you may be a little confused as to what exactly you should ask. To help you ask the right questions, I've provided you the Disrespectful Judgments Questionnaire:

Disrespectful Judgments Questionnaire

Circle the number that best represents your feelings about the way your spouse tries to influence your attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. If you circle a number greater than 1 for any question, try to think of an example that you can share with your spouse and write it on a sheet of paper.

1. Does your spouse ever try to "straighten you out?"

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

2. Does your spouse ever lecture you instead of respectfully discussing issues?

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

3. Does your spouse seem to feel that his or her opinion is superior to yours?

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

4. When you and your spouse discuss an issue, does he or she interrupt you or talk so much that you are prevented from having a chance to explain your position?

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

5. Are you afraid to discuss your points of view with your spouse?

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

6. Does your spouse ever ridicule your point of view?

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

The scoring for this questionnaire is simple. Unless all of your spouse's answers are "1," you're probably engaging in disrespectful judgments. Almost all of us are guilty of this Love Buster from time to time; so don't be alarmed if you get some twos or threes. But if your spouse gave you any fours, fives, sixes, or sevens, you're at risk to lose your spouse's love for you because your disrespectful judgments are rising to the level of abuse.

If your spouse identifies you as one who makes disrespectful judgments, you may be tempted to make yet another disrespectful judgment and claim that he or she is wrong! Resist that temptation at all costs because in every case of abuse, the victim is a far better judge of its existence than the perpetrator. Take his or her word for it, and start working on a plan to eliminate whatever it is your spouse interprets as disrespect.

When we try to impose our opinions on our spouses, we imply that they have poor judgment. That's disrespectful. We may not say this in so many words, but it's the clear message that they hear. If we valued their judgment more, we might question our own opinions. What if they're right, and we're wrong?

I'm not saying that you can't disagree with your spouse. But I want you to respectfully disagree. Try to understand your spouse's reasoning. Present the information that brought you to your opinion and listen to the information your spouse brings. Entertain the possibility that you might change your own mind, instead of just pointing out how wrong your spouse is.

That's how respectful persuasion works. You see, each of you brings two things into your marriage -- wisdom and foolishness. Your marriage will thrive when you blend your value systems, with each one's wisdom overriding the other's foolishness. By sharing your ideas, sorting through the pros and cons, you can create a belief system superior to what either of you had alone. But unless you approach the task with mutual respect, the process won't work and you will destroy your love for each other in the process.

In most cases, disrespectful judgments are nothing more than controlling and abusive attempts to get what you want in your marriage. As is the case with demands, disrespect doesn't work -- it's simply a form of verbal abuse.