

## LL36-Listening: Tune in or Tune out

I'm Doug Weiss, and I'm Alvean Lyons, Welcome to Love Life

So I need to do a little bit of set up for today's topic Alvean.

I'm ready.

We've all seen this kind of a scene in some rom com or situation comedy, the husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend is talking and their mate is distracted. They are off in their own little world doing something, and out of frustration at being ignored, the partner says so by the way I murdered someone today. And the partner replies, that's nice and we all laugh. The reason we all laugh is because we've all been there, we've all had that moment when we're not connecting. Are you hearing me, more importantly, are you listening? Do you really hear what I'm saying or are you just giving me the that's nice dear brush off, the sorry I'm into myself right now. So our question for today is how do couples stop this behavior, how do you learn to tune in instead of tuning out? Alvean, any tips for us, any suggestions?

Well at the risk of being disloyal to women I shall say the following. We talk so much that a lot of times men have as much trouble listening. When you're using an average of thirty thousand words per day and the average man uses seven you are twenty three thousand words past his threshold on any given day. Sometimes it is a struggle for men to be able to take in as much stimuli as we are comfortable with putting out. Sometimes when they say hey how was your day, what they're really just looking for is 'good'. Sometimes they don't actually want the entire list ..... so when I went to Whole Foods and this happened, and I was standing on line for fifteen minutes and then, oh myGod would you believe that I didn't even, they don't even do coupon comparison, did like oh my gosh, and then I turned around and there was this woman there and she looked just like Sarah, and her kids are in college now and she's struggling..... Really, to take in all of that, all of the time is hard. So what men will often do is to turn on autopilot and they have learned how to do the affirmative nod, the appropriate grunt to suggest that's interesting but really what they're just waiting for is when it goes silent so that they recognize at that moment they're supposed to say something in the silence. And many of them panic when it goes silent because they're not sure if they heard the last five things that you said that you want them to respond to. I mean it's the tuning in, knowing the odds are a bit big if you ask the question and then they're searching, they're racking their brains. What did she just say? I missed it in the soup of all the other words she was saying before that. It happens and sometimes it's completely innocuous, it's not meant to suggest that you're unimportant or that men don't care what you think or what your experiences are it's just that they are full. they were full at word seven thousand and one, At twenty two thousand three hundred sixty four they are struggling a little bit. So sometimes we just have to be a little more concise in how we deliver things, especially the things that we actually want real response to. Sometimes we just want to run our mouths and we're OK with the fact that our partners are just kind of listening. But when you really want their attention you need to be able to pause and say listen I actually want you to pay attention to this one because I really need to know something from you. Nine out of ten men are going to actually go into active listening mode because you said that this matters to you because they love you or care about you. They're going to shut everything else out and pay attention to you, and our job as women is to deliver that as directly as we can with clear expectations delivered in terms of what we want from you. Maybe I want your opinion or what I want you to do is just hear me or what I want you to do is to help me fix This. We help our mates by setting them up for success, by clarifying our expectations inside of said conversation, but if we can contain our package we are far more likely to get full engagement and active listening.

Well I may do a disservice to men but here goes. One of the things you touched on are the frequent errors that men tend to make in listening to women, assuming that every conversation requires us to do something. When your significant other comes home and talks about some hellish thing that has occurred in her day we may assume that she wants us to fix it. Well first of all you probably can't. Don't overestimate your behavior. I'm sorry Superman leave the cape at home. What she really wants is for you to just listen. And if you want to comment then comment by finding the point of compassionate sympathy. By that I mean when your

significant other says, and so and so did this, a good response is how did that make you feel? If it were me I would have been angry. By creating valence with another person.... and these are things which have to do with all relationships not just relationships between men and women, start by creating valence. In an episode some weeks ago Alvean talked about how we tend to process things. Women often.... again we want to avoid generalizations here..... begin from feeling and move towards the rational while men tend to start from the rational and move towards feeling. Just acknowledge that reality by creating a harmony with the feelings that are being expressed. You don't have to do anything, you're not being asked in fact to do anything unless you are explicitly being asked. It's fine to respond when your mate says to you what do you think I should do, I would do this or that. You've been invited into the decision making process. Until you have been invited to that decision process your best counsel my dear friend is hold your keep, and keep your powder dry. Listen, just listen and be supportive in the conversation. Find valence. You don't have to agree, in fact maybe you disagree completely, but if in fact you have a point to be made that would be helpful to your mate it is best made when she's ready to listen not when she's wanting to tell you what she feels about it. That's not an appropriate time to have that conversation. And don't align with the enemy like so many guys do when they say things like, well I think she had a point, and just walk into the windmill. No one asked you. Later when you pick up the tattered pieces.....Nothing was going to come from that what so ever. So I think that there is some guidance that we can give you but let's go back to the tuning in and tuning out question. This is about being in the moment with someone. It's about attention, giving people your undivided attention. There are no n sequiturs , such as watching your favorite T.V. when suddenly your significant other starts to talk about something in the manner you described earlier, Alvean. Well both of you need to understand that. That's fraught with peril. She needs to step back and acknowledge that you're in the midst of something right and the house isn't burning down. You need to take a beat, and acknowledge that there's something that's on her mind. And you can do this very simply by saying, something obviously is concerning you, should I turn off the TV, do you need me to pause this? That gives her the opportunity to say well no it's not or yes, I need to talk about this. This is important. You asked the question, she answered. If you ignore the signals at that point you're going to pay the price for it later. That is not to say that you're going to get into trouble but this is how relationships unravel, when people stop paying attention to meeting the needs of the person that they ostensibly care about and want the best for. When they're asking for your attention you need to give it.

What I'd say to women is every time he wants to sit down and watch the game or engage in something that he really enjoys doing that is not the time that you need to talk about everything because then it becomes harder for your partner to want to pause and give you the attention that you're requiring or requesting because every single time it seems that I'm not focused on you that's when you want my attention. So it's important that we own both of our parts in this tuning in and tuning out relationship. Am I delivering what I need to deliver, am I acknowledging the fact that timing does matter, and is the person whose attention is being requested actually showing that when it matters to you it matters to me. It goes both ways for sure but doesn't have to go off the cliff. if we're actually really engaging in being appropriate and honest with each other in this process.

A useful way to do that I found is what I call echoing. I think I hear you saying this, or what I thought I heard you say is that, is that right, is that what you meant? That gives the other person an opportunity to clarify if you don't have it right. It doesn't meet them with a response. I found it interesting the other day there was a piece on the news about the fact that that our president in meeting with the families of a recent tragic event had a prompt sheet and the last item was I hear you. I won't comment on why he needed to be reminded of that, but it's a lesson we could all learn from. I hear you is the first thing, the most important thing to do in any situation especially when there's any kind of emotion attached. To acknowledge them.

As we close we should add that the one thing that every human being wants is the same thing, to be seen, to be heard and to be understood. You want to know that you matter and the way that we do that is how we engage with each other.

That's it for this week and we hope that you enjoyed it. Please write to us and tell us how you feel about this or any other topic and suggest some topics we might discuss in another episode.

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We want to thank Chelsea Washington, our producer, Todd Washburn, our Recording Engineer and the entire Love Life family, including you, our listeners. We'll be back next week with another episode. Until then, have a wonderful week. Bye folks.