

The Love Languages

Alvean, I was standing in the line at the supermarket the other day. And they have in this supermarket, I suspect like many, a rack full of tabloid magazines. And several of them had a story about or featured the phrase, love language. One headline was, he doesn't speak her love language. I've heard this phrase used a number of times, and I suspect our audiences has heard it a lot and may know what it means. But I want to put myself on the side of those who may have a clue but not a really strong idea what exactly we mean when we talk about people's love languages.

Well, what's so interesting about that is that there's so many people who do talk about it, and it does pop up even when people don't have or use the terminology, love language. It actually originated with a long-standing New York Times bestseller by Gary Chapman who first talked about the five love languages. In it, he talks about five different ways in which people process and communicate love and the five that he includes are words of affirmation, quality time, physical touch, gifts, and acts of service. Many of us process love through one or more of those lenses. So, we have a primary love language, and sometimes a secondary one. We often communicate through a particular language. And what's interesting is that you may prefer to receive love one way but communicate love a different way. So, I'll use myself as an example. I like to be loved with words of affirmation, and acts of service. That's how I like to receive my love. I like to give love through words of affirmation, and touch generally, that is how I will often give it back. I'm naturally very affectionate, and I am naturally very affirming verbally, but because I don't always have a lot of physical time, acts of services are challenging for me. So if my partner, If Matt needed to experience love, through acts of service, we would have a tough time in the way that we connect with each other. Because if that's his primary love language, if that's the primary way in which he understands that he's being loved, and it's the thing that I am least proficient in. That is like me saying Je t'aime to him in French, which means I love you, and him only understanding I love you in English. So, I'm actively trying to say that I love you, but because you don't speak the language that I speak, it doesn't matter how many times I say it. It does not matter because you don't understand what I'm saying. Love languages are really about our ability to communicate to our partner through the lens they understand as love, as a whole.

So, I'm going to... forgive me ...dumb that down, which is easy for me, and say that how I want to be loved; what makes me feel loved, may not necessarily be the way that I reflect back to others that I love them. And If I don't recognize another person's love language, what makes them feel loved I run the risk that I may be doing things that in my mind are loving and caring, but I'm not expressing that in a way that lets the other person feel loved.

That's exactly right.

So, I think this probably not probably, but certainly happens a lot. Is there a process, short of the obvious, which is, let's talk about this, that couples can follow to try to identify their love languages and come up with a strategy for meeting each other's needs?

Well, I think that the most important thing is to figure out where you are, what is your language, because I hear so often from couples, and you referenced that in terms of the magazine covers, he or she doesn't love me the way that I need to be loved. And they speak about it as a deficiency, there's something wrong with my partner. As a result, they are struggling with being able to enjoy their relationship because of this deficiency. Where love languages are concerned, it's not an issue of deficiency but rather whether we recognize the difference between what it is that our partners process as love and what we process as love? And, do I have the language to communicate to my partner. The first thing we need is the You Are Here, like the the old school little maps in the mall when we were younger prior to GPS, You got lost, you look for the little kiosk that had the whole layout of the mall, and you looked for that little red X on it to figure out where you were standing relative to where you were trying to go. A lot of times, we don't even recognize where we're standing. So it's very hard for our partners to figure out how to find us when we don't know where we are. If I don't recognize that one of the things that I need are acts of service, or if I don't recognize the one of the things I need are words of affirmation, that I can't even communicate to my partner. This is what is missing for me. So, one strategy would be to reinforce with your partner, those things that they're doing right. When they get it right, clap, clap for them. Give them feedback, hey, I really liked it, you know, that makes me feel loved, that makes me feel good.

You know, I want to say this to the men in our audience. Because I'm going to bet that you've had a moment where you've said to yourself something along these lines, I'm doing x y&z Why doesn't she understand? I love her. Why is she asking me if I love her? Doesn't she know, because I did this, and I did that.

And in all fairness, since you're going to speak to the men, Let me speak to the women who are listening. When he does the thing that you want him to do, affirm him so that he recognizes that he did good. Yes, men in general, I will not say every man because there we don't speak in absolutes, but men in general are very recipe oriented. If a cup of this produces that, if an act like this equals that, then I will repeat said thing, If I get a positive response as a byproduct of it. So, you can't just correct him when he's wrong. You have to affirm him when he's done what's right for you, as well.

Well, and I'd agree blanket statements are always a mistake. But you know, from a gender perspective, it's frequently an issue for men to live at that level of emotional awareness on a consistent basis. It's not part of our orientation. We live in an action, or much more action oriented externalized kind of environment. So, we're a little less introspective, generally speaking, and a little less inclined to think about why until we come up against the wall of a question that's being posed to us, or a situation that forces us to reflect on what's working or not working particularly well. So, when it comes to love languages one of the lessons here is, it's not enough to say, I mean, when you come up against that question why doesn't she

understand that I love her? Why, am I being asked, why doesn't she understand? Put it in language terms and say, well, gosh, how come since I speak Italian and she speaks German, we're having trouble communicating? What could possibly be wrong here? One of us needs to learn how to be bilingual.

That's right. Or both of us. And you're absolutely right. We have to learn how to flex our language. You can move pretty fluidly between the language that you speak and the language that your partner speaks, because there may be some slight differences between those things. But recognizing that I want Matt to feel very special right now and I know that he really loves quality time, so even if that's not in my love language, I'm going to pause what I'm doing and I'm going to make sure that I'm carving out time to spend with him, because I recognize that he will process that time as love. My goal is to let him know today how important he is and how much I love him. I'm doing the thing that he enjoys most or processes most as love. So, I will speak to him in the Italian that he's fluent in. Because I recognize that that is his natural language.

Absolutely. And I want to add here, parenthetically, again, a note for the gentlemen in our audience. Regardless of whether you've got the languages, right, A moment of spontaneity and something that is thoughtful, goes a long way. No break down on your way home, stop and buy some flowers.....

If she likes flowers

Well I'll guarantee you even if she doesn't like flowers, the sentiment, the fact that you took the time and did it will matter. Whatever your gesture of affection, I think that the need to keep things fresh is important. I'm going to guess that although Chapman outlines these five love languages, that there are probably a lot of variations on the theme that go beyond the five broad divisions, because human beings are very nuanced. And, you know, what causes us to feel one way on a given day about something or about someone can be different on another day.

Absolutely. I think you said that we can speak multiple languages. You're right, because they are broad categories. What does active service look like? What that may mean for me may be different for somebody else. What does quality time look like? Is it sitting at the movies and we spent quality time together? Or do I really consider quality time that we are quietly sitting on the beach and we're talking to each other and we're really plugged in. It may mean something different for each person. So, it's important to recognize the nuance of your particular partner and meet them where they are.

So it might sometimes be useful..... another one of those gratuitous tips for the men in our audience to ask the question, what makes you feel loved? You don't have to remain in the dark about this. You can actually ask.

You don't. You don't have to guess it's okay to ask. Because, if your wife or partner has children, or you guys have children together, one of the greatest ways to communicate how much you love your partner is to do some of the work that he or she may be carrying every day. When I don't have to put the kids to bed and do the bath time, and the story after that, or if I don't have to vacuum and do the dishes right after dinner, then the likelihood is that when you want that extra special attention later, I'll have the energy for that. Because you showed me how much you love me by taking something off of my plate. I can show you how much I love you by putting something on yours.

You can tell these are words of wisdom. And we'll just leave it at that.

Another episode of love life. Thank you, Todd and Kamaria for helping us with this topic. And thank you audience for listening to us. If you have some thoughts about this episode or had some ideas for another topic you'd like us to take on, please write to us at alvean@lovelife.digital or doug@lovelife.digital.

And we will be back next week with another interesting topic to talk about, hopefully, one that you suggested.

We'll See you then