

SIMPLE REFRAMING

Four Approaches to Desire

A CLEAR ANSWER—EVEN THE ANSWER YOU WANT—IS JUST A FEW WORDS AWAY

“PUT YOUR SHOES ON, I’ll get your coat; I’m taking you out to dinner tonight.”

I look up through wet lashes and a furrowed brow toward this calm yet commanding voice, my vision blurred, my nervous system frayed. I’ve been battling my computer all day, facing one technical snafu after another, trying to meet a deadline. One look at my blotchy face tells my husband all he needs to know: I need a break NOW. His words cut through my fog of frustration and fatigue, and I acquiesce.

My husband is one of the most tender, kind, and wise men I’ve ever known. In his wisdom, he’s learned when to take charge with me. He knows that giving me a command sometimes *is* the kindest thing he can do. Thoughtfully applied, taking command brings balance to a relationship. It can help dispel a vicious cycle and allows one partner to relax into the strength of the other. Of course, there are occasions when his take-charge attitude is met by equally stubborn resistance, and in those instances, he

usually knows enough to try a different approach. Like I said, he’s a wise man.

Herein lies an important key to skillful communication—how do we keep finding ways that create clear connections instead of blurry attempts and missed opportunities? Part of my job as a coach is helping clients find new ways of perceiving old problems. People pay me good money to name the obvious . . . and then to find a not-so-obvious approach to shifting awareness around it.

One common area where both singles and couples complain they “don’t know what they’re doing wrong” is in creating quality time with another (aka a date). When someone comes to me complaining that they are not getting the results they want in this arena, I share a foundational observation about four basic communication approaches:



« *Crow Wants a Pickle*
Cori Lee Marvin

Invitations involve two exciting elements. They let the person you're asking know: I want to share an experience with you; and I am willing to take responsibility for making it happen.

Command, Offer, Invitation, and Request. Knowing how and when to apply these four different approaches can significantly increase their positive results.

A Command requires the person taking charge to embody a healthy confidence, and it presumes an implicit level of intimacy. As long as the recipient inherently trusts that the command is being made with their best interest at heart, it can be very effective. If done from an unconscious desire to squelch another's autonomy or expression, it will ultimately backfire.

Making an Offer is the most popular—and most passive—approach in attempting connection. With an Offer, we are vaguely letting someone know that something is important to us without actually asking for what we want. Often the person making the Offer thinks they have been clear in making their intention known (“Come on over anytime!”), but the receiver hasn't a clue that the Offer has anything to do with them personally. As the old marketing adage says, “If the customer is confused about what you're selling, their answer is ‘no.’”

One of the most powerful communication shifts I coach clients to make is learning how to make clear Invitations. Invitations involve two exciting elements. They let the person you're asking know:

- 1) I want to share an experience with you; and
- 2) I am willing to take responsibility for making it happen.

This level of candor creates a dynamic tension where the recipient directly feels your attention and must respond. Whether they say “yes” or “no” or “I don't know” to your invitation becomes secondary to the impact your undivided attention and intention has on them (if they say “I don't know,” take it as a “no” and move on). Receiving clear, personal invites is flattering to the recipient and

deepens presence in the asker. *Upgrading wishy-washy offers to purposeful invitations is one of the best ways to start getting more of what you want in your relationships.*

The Request approach is borrowed from international conflict mediator Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication. NVC models a way to clarify personal feelings and values and then, based on this data, supports people in making clear requests for what they want. NVC is a great tool for helping couples unravel their stories about each other (“You don't care how I feel!”) and instead take responsibility for actually asking for what they truly want (“I have a need to be heard about topic X, and I am wondering if you'd be willing to give me some empathy.”)

These foundational approaches all have value, yet knowing which one to employ can make all the difference between igniting chemistry or creating confusion.

—JOY HOSEY

practice

Four Approaches to a Movie

Try applying all four in a practice scenario, and notice which ones feel the most—and the least—familiar. Then use the one/s that are the least familiar with someone you're interested in knowing better and notice your results.

Command: “That film is finally opening Saturday night: I'll pick you up at seven!”

Offer: “It looks like that movie we've been waiting for is finally opening this weekend. We should go.”

Invitation: “I would love to take you to that movie. Are you available on Saturday night?”

Request: “I can't remember the last time we went to a movie. My request is that we make a plan to see the opening of this film this weekend and have some quality time together.”