

Working Through the Three-Minute Barrier

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Have you ever found yourself in one of the following situations?

- You've just had one of "those" days.
- Your spouse is giving you clear signals that they've had the same kind of day, too.
- You get all of the insanity and all of the demands of your days behind you.
- You sit down, write your dialogue letter, and present it to your beloved with a kiss.

After reading your husband or wife's love letter to you, you close their dialogue book, making that familiar sound. After a brief discussion, you decide which feeling is the strongest, you ask or answer a question or two about the feeling until you both conclude that the feeling is "understood" by both, so you turn to each other, finish with a kiss and a "Thank you" and you go on to the next thing on your list.

Perhaps you've experienced this scenario instead; you and your spouse sit down to exchange your dialogue letters, after reading your letters, you both agree that your feeling is the strongest feeling, so you begin to dialogue on your feeling. After a short while, the discussion gets to a point where you judge that you've shared all of the "easy" ways to describe your feeling and you let your spouse "in" far enough, so you convince yourself and your beloved that they've "got" your feeling so the dialogue is done.

Maybe you've experienced this scenario: you are the one who is listening to the feeling being shared and you conclude that you've asked all of the questions that you can think of relating to the color of the feeling, the intensity of the feeling, or what it would look like if it were a scene in nature. You eventually conclude that you've discovered all you can about your spouse's feeling, so you let the dialogue end at that point.

If you take a close look, you've likely often had dialogues that went something like one or more of these examples. In each case, you've experienced an example of what is commonly known as the **three-minute barrier**.

In general, the three-minute barrier is when the person who is listening to the feeling being described gets to the point of intellectually understanding the other's feeling, and both who are dialoguing let the dialogue stop there. Our experience is that it takes about three minutes for us to get to this point.

Now, we are all very busy people. We are often tempted to succumb to the false notion that "I" have described my feeling enough and "You" have listened enough to my feeling or vice versa and now we can move on to the next task on our list. And other times, there have also been many nights when we picked up the pens a little too late and it is easy to exchange love letters, dialogue for three minutes or so and because the call of the pillow is strong we say, "We both got it? Right?" There are other times when we are describing a feeling and we reach a point where we have let our beloved in as far as we are willing to let them in. At these times, we use the three-minute barrier to protect ourselves and keep our spouse at a safe distance. Either way, we've short-changed our dialogue and, in reality, we've short-changed our relationship.

If you struggle with this, there may be many reasons why. Like us, it may be because you are not in your prime time and are too tired to go on. It may simply be because you don't know how to go any deeper in your descriptions of your feelings. It may also be that you are unsure of how to listen in a way that enables you to go beyond the level of understanding the feeling that your spouse is sharing with you. No matter what the reason is, we have learned that it takes about three minutes to reach this point.

When it comes to punching through the three-minute barrier, we've learned that the length of our dialogue time is directly related to two things. The first is how much we are willing to listen to our beloved spouse. The second is how much we are willing to open up to our spouse and how vulnerable we are willing to be with them.

To break through the barrier, when we are listening, we have to really strive to listen with our hearts. We have also come to know that the journey from "listening with our ears" to "listening with our hearts" goes through just about all of our senses. We have to "listen with our mouth" by asking questions. We have to "listen with our eyes" by maintaining eye contact and paying attention to our spouse's non-verbal communication. These give us many clues to what the other is feeling, but we need to check with them to make sure we have heard them right. We need to stay physically close to each other. In fact, we can also "listen with our hands", too. Our sensitivity to our beloved's responses to our touch or the way they are holding our hand also tells us a lot about their feeling as well.

Just so you don't think breaking through the three-minute barrier is all of the listener's responsibility... The listener can't do their part unless the feelings are being described as fully and as lovingly as possible. Our intimacy is directly related to our openness and vulnerability with our spouse. When we are describing our feelings, we need to go beyond sharing the easy-to-share feelings or the feelings that are on the surface. We need to regularly take risks in our dialogues, be vulnerable with our spouses, and trust in their goodness and their love for us. After all, aren't these the things that were so wonderful and had such a profound impact on us on our Weekends?

In short, we need to have a hunger and a yearning for deeper intimacy in our relationships to help us break through the three-minute barrier. This means striving to keep going even after we think we understand the feeling and striving to feel what the other is describing or allow them to feel what you are describing to them. Sometimes this is very hard to do. Hey, we've been there! It's much easier to close the notebooks, making that familiar sound, say to your spouse, "We've got it", and roll over and go to bed or move on to the next task on our life to-do list. But think about what you are missing out on! So, next time, be aware of the three-minute barrier and when you find yourself there, stop, look at each other, give each other a kiss, and keep going! Give your spouse your all for the ten minutes that you set aside for dialogue. It's absolutely worth it!