

Problem of Perception

Editor's Note: Arthur Nowlin, half of the dynamic Drama Files Team passed away earlier this month. His dedicated work, honest wit, and spiritual leadership to this and other ministries will be sorely missed. Our prayers continue with Dr. Kim Logan-Nowlin and their family.

Russell and Rachael began counseling with Arthur and me three months ago. Russell had a problem with Rachael being so friendly with her co-workers.



Rachel tried to reassure her husband that it was nothing, but he was still very uncomfortable with her behavior. The couple had been married four years. Russell made the initial call to help clarify his wife's nonchalant attitude towards the matter. It was driving a wedge between them and he did not want it to continue he said several times. Rachael thought he was over-reacting and that counseling was a waste of time and money. Russell still wanted her to attend, so she did.

How Things Look

After listening to the concerns of Russell and Rachael we shared a perspective with them on the understanding of perception. Rachael never thought about how things were being perceived by her co-workers and began to realize that what she was doing gave them the wrong idea. Perception is a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something; a mental impression. One of the major problems in communicating is the differences in perception. What is my perception verses your perception of the communication, whether verbal or nonverbal? It is important that individuals in a couple examine their perceptions, feelings and concerns to come to an accurate understanding of what is happening in their relationship.

Message Identifying

Our approach, or "Nowlin Concept," is called Message Identifying. It is learning to recognize and understand the sender's message to formulate and then convey a correct response.

Here's what remind our clients:

- Approach a conversation with your partner in a sensitive manner and demonstrate genuine concern.

- Communicate to your partner with an open mind.
- Listen to your partner without being judgmental.
- Determine reality with your partner, because your communication reality may not be your partner's communication reality.

This approach has helped Rachael see how her flirting was causing Russell to be uncomfortable and that someone's perception could interpret her action in a negative and harmful manner.

Did He Set The Stage?

Russell had to also learn that listening was not all about him, but that he needed to listen to his wife's needs and desires. Rachael selfishly flirted and sought the attention of other men. The question became why? Why was she looking for love in all the wrong places?

Rachael admitted that she felt that Russell no longer desired her. He would not compliment her or encourage her. He had stopped inquiring about her day at the office or her interests. They had fallen into the trap of being a "routine couple," going about the day-to-day business while neglecting their marriage. Therefore, she began seeking outside attention from other men and she began liking how it made her feel.

"I felt revived and like a beautiful woman," Rachel said. Russell apologized for making her feel so unloved and unwanted. She told him "your perception of me was cleaning our home, cooking, attending to you and nothing more. My perception was to be a partner of equal importance and appreciation and also have our needs met and satisfied by one another but again your perception was not mine. It became clear that I needed more in my life that my husband could not provide."

Rachael also mentioned in therapy that "What is very interesting is that you noticed I lost interest in you and that frightened you."

Reconstructing Perception

Russell and Rachel must continue to build on the right perceptions of one another, to appreciate one another's interest and enjoy one another.

The couple continues to receive counseling and both parties are working hard in their commitment to one another. Rachael is no longer flirting or dressing to attract other men. She has learned to carry herself as a respectful woman and always give the right perception to others. Russell continues to support, compliment and date his wife on a regular basis.

Once a week he brings flowers home, washes, cleans the house and cooks dinner. His perception of a wife has changed from housekeeper or maid to helpmeet. He has recommitted to loving his wife with all appreciation, kindness, and respect. They both have a positive perception of their marriage and they are both pleased that they attended Christian counseling.

The names have been changed to protect the innocent.