














# Leveling the Playing Field

I just can't think or talk when they are making their point		I find out too late what my partner thinks		They don't give me a chance to get my point across
	Why doesn't my partner just speak up?			We want to sort things out - but how do we?
I often say the wrong words, what can I do?			People often ask me what I think but I am not ready to say it	
We usually give up and wonder if we should even be together			We solve our discussions ~ - I just say, "Yes dear"	

## ***Leveling the Playing Field***

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**Play fair! – But how?** Have you ever tried to play with someone who does not give you a chance to go to bat or have the ball?

Remember trying to play with someone who has a good number of jacks and they never gave you a chance to scramble for them too? Or, how about playing hockey with the hotshot who takes the puck on their stick down the ice and never passes it over to you? How about in basketball? In one-on-one, the player who shoots repeatedly and even gets their own rebounds and you never even touch the ball?

Well, the **Home Team** needs to play as a team also. Sharing the play with your teammates will bring up the same requirement to share the ball – chance to talk and decide with all having fair input. Yes, we have different skills and may have different assignments, but when it comes to discussion and decision-making, the partners should have equal access to the process. And this is a realm where differences in abilities can be a challenge.

If one of the partners is a very effective speaker and the other is a quiet sort or someone who is less precise with words, we can imagine how the discussions could go. It is very important to recognize this imbalance and contrast because in our society we so value a good presentation. As an example, we have faith in our justice system that relies on the validity of points expressed clearly and exquisitely by two very articulate lawyers. After hearing both sides, the jury weighs the points and their decision is generally considered fair under those circumstances.

Yet at home, it is important to remember that it is not a court, and even poorly articulated points can be just as important as the finely made ones. You did not marry your spouse because you are both as articulate as lawyers (– if you did, you still should read on). You care about what is inside your partner – not how well they express themselves. Even if they do so with sketchy words, it is truly important to gather the gist of the meaning, because having both of you involved in the process is going to make all the difference in your satisfaction with the project and with each other.

### **Are you in need of a level field?**

Do you find in discussions that one of you is fully engaged in the discussion while the other has trouble getting their words out? Do they become frustrated when you debate their points and they say, “That’s not what I

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said!” And they become flustered that they have upset you? Does it seem very hard to come to any conclusions because so many discussions turn into arguments? If so, it could be that neither of you is doing something wrong, but you have not created a level playing field.

### ***What to do?***

So, if you are a wordy person and enjoy debate, you will need to control yourself so that your partner can have opportunities to express their point of view. You may need to be quiet for longer periods than usual to let them pause, consider, and pick their words in order to express their attitudes and ideas. It is truly worth the wait, because you will have to live with whatever happens either way.

If your partner has difficulty choosing exact words, you may need to practice hearing them through a filter that will allow you to understand the general meaning of their words before you take their suggestion literally. Once your partner seems satisfied that they have said their piece, you can mull over what was said slowly and can gently ask clarifying questions to help hone their ideas to more precise meanings. This does not in any way detract from their intelligence. Rather, there can be many ideas that are sheer genius in the 3-dimensional world, but can translate very poorly into the linear world of words. And home renovation will bring out this contrast more than almost any other home activity. So be prepared for an elevated conflict level. But at the same time, however, because this effect is

so apparent here in home renovation, it can become like a family laboratory in which you can experiment with new ways to



address this contrast in speaking styles and can learn unique approaches that will work for your own home team. You can then carry those skills into other areas of your life together!

If you know a lot about renovating and your partner does not, you still need to consider their point of view, preferences, and willingness to go along with what you are proposing in the project. They might not use the right words, they might get frustrated or even suggest some extraordinary notions – but God love them, they are your very own partner, and their ideas do need to be resolved

for them to be at peace with the project and proceed.

Some of the more unusual ideas perhaps need the most attention, because if they are very important to your partner, and you go ahead and do just the opposite, your partner may become quite distraught and impede the progress altogether. This does not mean that you need to teach them everything you know about renovating, but you should respectfully address their lack of understanding and help them come to terms with your different levels of knowledge even if it is just to smooth things along. See the chapters on ways to help define what positive contributions each partner can make. Your acceptance of your partner as you each candidly face both of your limitations will deepen your love and security with each other.

## Filters

Like 'rose-colored glasses,' you can put on filters that help you to listen and speak well with your partner. How?

Repeat these affirming words to yourself while speaking or listening during any difficult conversations.

I love you.

You are competent.

You love me.

Our vows are important to each of us.

We are committed to care about each other.

I will wait as needed.

If that did not sound right, let's try it again.

What you are saying is important to me.

I want to give you a chance to share your thoughts, your self, with me.

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## **I AM the one who has difficulty with words –**

### **What do I do?**

So, if you are the less verbal one – what do you do? You will need to build and practice some verbal ‘fences and rows’ to get communication adjusted when it has gone wild. That is, it is important that you let your partner know when you are having trouble expressing yourself.

Words are a poor fit for many ideas. Many ideas in your mind can be a poor fit with words. Some languages reflect certain meanings in great detail, while others just skip what it’s about. Take the word ‘snow’. In English, we have just ‘snow,’ ‘sleet,’ and ‘flurry,’ (and perhaps a few more), while in the Eskimo language, I am told there are dozens of words for snow and its varieties. Our minds can be like that – having many ideas without the proper words for expressing them. This is especially likely to happen when tackling the world of space and renovation – how do you describe a multi-tenon joint to the novice? Pretty tough. It is important to remember that the ideas and feelings inside of both of you are important, and also that the limitations of expressing such ideas may not be your fault. Growing up, many smart folks with great abilities were teased and ridiculed for their poor verbal expression – and that does not help you today. But it is important to remember that words do not make value. God made you just fine, and the world needs you as you are – and wants your contribution, even if it does not fit easily into words.



### **Make Fences for your Thoughts and Rows for Words.**

Just as a gardener puts in fences to protect the garden, and plants seeds in rows to create order and separation, you can organize the conversation to reflect your needs. If your partner's many words and fast pace make it too hard for you to express your thoughts, you will need to let them know – suggest they slow it down to give you an opportunity to sketch out your ideas and share them.

If you try to operate in their field you will be overwhelmed, speak too fast, and say things you don't mean. Then they will get wrapped up in something you had not intended, and yuck! But – there are ways to avoid this, other than shutting down. You still can talk – just change the landscape: put up some fences to keep out misunderstandings and order those wild words into rows where you can weed out the unintended meanings.

### **What to say when I am swarmed by a word invasion?**

Even though a swarming bee-hive makes you flustered, you will make you flustered, you will tactfully. Words said tactfully will work; and things should settle down so you can both have a chance to say your piece. Then you can breathe and think and talk. Each time you get into this and use these methods, you should be sure to spend at least 15 minutes in the conversation. It will have a good practice effect this way. Of course if the situation escalates into something very unpleasant, please do duck out and try again later – but really, as much as possible, try to keep the conversation going,

hive of words can need to say things



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and stay with it even if it is somewhat uncomfortable. Continue for the 15 minutes, and it will have good long-term effects. The feeling will be like letting a bee nose around you and then pass by, while you watch with some nervous discomfort.

### **Try these:**

"I need to say something but can't find the right words."

"Please give me a minute to think about this."

"Let me say this a couple of ways and we can figure out how it goes."

"That's not what I meant to say."

You should practice this one until you can say it extra calmly. Ah, you may object: "Gosh, I've said that a thousand times – how could it work now?" Well, probably you have said it before with a great deal of emotion and frustration, and then maybe gave up right afterwards, throwing your hands up in exasperation. The important thing about this one is to provide it as INFORMATION to your partner, and then to remain calm and engaged, following it with:

"Please listen to the idea in what I am saying – my words are not saying it exactly."

"I need a break, let's talk about this later."

Then breathe. And speak slowly – and even pause. Let yourself have the luxury of time within the conversation. Your partner loves you and really wants to understand your inner thoughts and feelings. They do not care if you aren't a fancy talker – they just want to love you and respect your hopes, dreams, and desires. So – share them!

## **Notes from Leveling the Playing Field**

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**Level play may be needed at your home - let's get the batters warmed up~**

**If you are the Talker -**

**What are 3 things you can do to give your partner more of a chance to speak up?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**If you are the one who has trouble getting the words out -**

**Go back in the chapter and check (or highlight) the lines that might work for you:**

To buy time~

To back up when you have said the wrong words~

To Ask for clarification~

**If you are the one who ends up listening to misspoken words -**

**Write down three affirming thoughts about your partner to repeat to yourself while listening:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.