
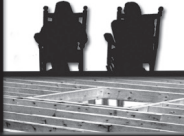













Why this project?

How <u>should</u> I react when they start a project & don't ask me?		I am ready to get at it, but feel frustrated at delays		My partner wants to build a huge project - why?
What if their project looks like retaliation?		I am giving up my dream, why shouldn't they be happy?		
	What projects are signs of commitment?			Do people really Communicate in code?
	My partner keeps talking about a big project but I'm just not ready		Why are they doing <u>this</u> project instead of what I asked?	

Why this project?

Your partner is suddenly ^{all involved in a project} and in your surprise, you wonder, “What is going on here?”

Perhaps something was talked about remotely a few months ago, but got lost in other conversations and bustling kids. But now, instead of doing the predictable (or desired) tasks of the day, your partner is suddenly all in a flurry – preparing a work site, getting supplies, moving quickly about, and ignoring all that is around them.

So, what is going on?

Lots of things, perhaps. Sometimes it is just a quick job that must be done before others can be, or perhaps it requires special weather conditions that are just right today. Yes, all that. But is there more to it?

Many times, yes, there is more to it. (But not always.)

Non-verbal communication and code language –

A lesson

We all listen to someone while they are speaking in ways beyond their words. Perhaps we notice their tone, inflection, body posture, eyes, tilt of the head, and so on. These are all elements in communicating the meaning of a set of words. If you were only to look at a transcript of the conversation, you really would not get the whole meaning, just the facts. Pure words can be misleading; we need to hear the context and the spin of the language - We need to consider the use of sarcasm and humor and how these can reverse the meanings of words and sentences. And there is more...

Have you ever had a conversation with someone with no words at all? Most of us have – how about during a boring meeting at work? Surely you have a friend you may glance at and communicate the relative importance of the material being presented. Your eyes convey how dull and repetitive it is. The other indicates agreement, then one of you quietly motions that it is time to get back on task and cooperate with the flow. Then perhaps you or your friend makes a comment to the whole group – a good relevant suggestion, or a request to break for lunch soon and follow up with a memo or assign subcommittee work. You both feel acknowledged;

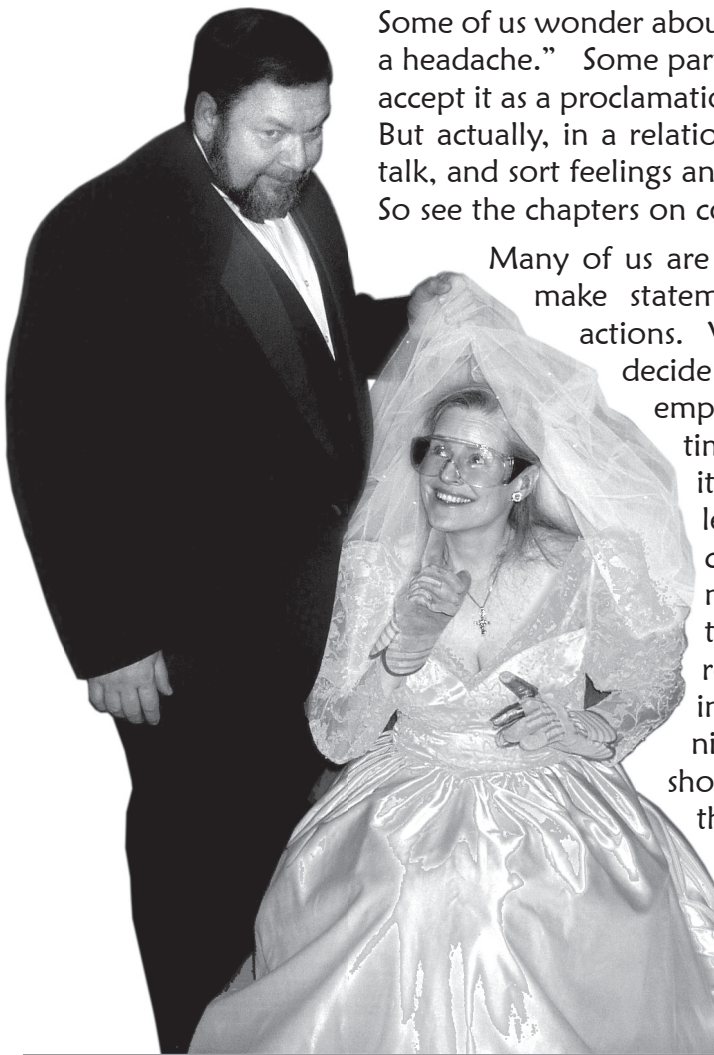
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and the one making the suggestion feels more confident that the solution meets more than just his/her own needs.

If you have a teenager around, you may usually 'enjoy' many non-verbal messages in the form of sighs, closed doors, and the occasional chore conspicuously done when they are sorry. And then for the poor suitors, there is the legendary – "I can't go out with you because I have to wash my hair tonight." Which is code for "Leave me alone and don't ask again."

Some of us wonder about the meaning of "I have a headache." Some partners ask and talk, others accept it as a proclamation and are disappointed. But actually, in a relationship, one can ask, and talk, and sort feelings and pressures out together. So see the chapters on communication too.

Many of us are aware of how we may make statements to others in our actions. We do this when we decide – "Someone else can empty the dishwasher this time; I have been left with it too often." Or, "I'll leave the gas in the car close to empty and let my son fill the tank this time so he can learn some responsibility." And the inner thought, "I'll make a nice snack for the kids and show them how welcome they are and how much I love them." These messages are more than a sink full of dishes, an empty gas tank, and a grocery bag of chips.



Inside we may harbor a resentment as we calculate who benefits from a project. Yet it is a very interesting issue -

Some folks can launch headlong into a project and appear to be self-centered and bull-headed but are really doing it solely to please the other person. Think back -- does this project meet a need that was part of a previous conflict? Ask yourself how it affects the main issues touched by it. Have the kids been fighting over television and he is building a new family room for an extra TV? As you consider →

What can be the meaning in what you see?

Type of code	What you see
Reconciliation	They really want to invest in a joint project and get you on board with them. Can't wait to get started; keep interrupting other plans to get on the project.
Meaning & some hints	If you support it, fine, jump in. But if you want some other needs satisfied such as fun together or seeing relatives and you are being over-pressured, you will need to talk about the reconciliation and help your partner adjust their pace to meet both of your needs.
Amends, relenting	They are jumping into a project long overdue, or longed for.
Meaning & some hints	It may be impractical but is someone's way of saying something important -- or even giving in. Be quiet; let them save face. Say, "Thank you."
Appears Selfish	Out there spending your family's money and working on a project that benefits no one but them!
Meaning & some hints	Examine whether you are doing the same thing with other issues. Perhaps you are not understanding fully how they believe they are contributing to the family on a regular basis. If they are draining the family's time, money and patience repeatedly, it could be time to bring it up and talk it through -- about their impact, or the imbalance of resources. Maybe see a counselor if you think this is too hard to do yourself.
Commitment	Long-term effort or work projects with long-lasting value.
Meaning & some hints	If you want the commitment to the project and to each other, fine. But if you are just friends and not sure, this is the time to talk it through before you are in too deep.

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this, it may soften your heart, and you will approach your partner more calmly and caringly. Sometimes project choices are a 'message-in-code.' So, try to de-code some notions of what could be intended, and prepare your heart for the possibilities before you presume to become angry with the other person.

Type of code		What you see
The generous gift - even sacrifice		Over-buying or over-working on a project, possibly even ruining their chances of personal satisfaction or missing an important event to do so.
Meaning & some hints	It appears to be a gift, but you need to make sure that they are ready to make the sacrifice and won't be resentful later. Are they over-spending instead of communicating love? You may need to reassure them of your love & appreciation.	
The need for acknowledgment		They may be tearing apart places currently in common use -- appearing to disregard its impact on others.
Meaning & some hints	They may really need to have an opportunity to vent their feelings to a loved one, or perhaps feel appreciated for their other contributions.	
Rebellion		They are launching a project you already discussed and had opposed!
Meaning & some hints	They may be saying in code that they do not like the methods of discussion and decision-making, or perhaps other dynamics of the relationship. Sounds like you two need to talk. Also check the chapter called Leveling the Playing Field.	
Retaliation		They may be missing an event that is important to you; they may be ruining the prospects for a project you favored; they may be reckless; they may be hastily throwing together a hut-built-for-one to symbolically wall you out.
Meaning & some hints	Sounds like they are mad. It won't help to just react in code also--so don't jump into the fray. Instead, look into your heart: Why are they mad? Is it you? Perhaps. Be willing to own some of the source of their irritation before you engage. Then go in slowly and try to talk about what is going on with your partner. Calm communication is good at this time, and can save on mis-sawn materials and hasty actions.	

They are efforts to teach and to convey love, frustration, and caring. By themselves these actions do not complete the objective – it will take verbal reinforcement and follow-through to conclude the drama that one has begun with the scene opener. The dishwasher expectation will need to be discussed at a teachable moment. The gas situation will need some warning of the empty tank and problem solving to help develop the sense of responsibility that the parent seeks to nurture. The snack will need a kind tone and loving words to convey the true meaning of the gesture.

When it comes to bigger projects, and choices that will alter the family home, often there is a desire to redraw the family environment to a more ideal state. In this ideal – we search for the perfect family home, the perfect self, the perfect partner, and perfect relations with our children – or at least we begin imagining such things, even if never attained. By looking at the choices revealed, we are privy to a small window -- a peek inside that person to see what the initiator believes to be



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their ideal family. This is an intimate and special moment to share between partners in a family. It is an opportunity to cherish each other's ideals and as you do so, gently you blend and develop a more meaningful vision together of the present and future for the family.

So, how does this work?

It may be helpful to consider how the job fits into the physical & emotional needs of the family.

Some tasks begun suddenly can be an answer to spoken and implied requests embedded in the relationship.

Consider ~

Consider a couple, living together in a jointly owned house, and wondering whether to take their relationship to a deeper commitment or to break up. One day, while in their travels, they decide to build a new patio with a perennial garden. They pick up the materials and start the 3-month project that will personalize their property; property that was perfectly good to sell previously.

Have they made a statement about commitment?

How about – this situation ~

A young married couple is mulling over the husband's anticipated promotion that requires distant relocation, far from their current home near both of their families. The husband is eager to start accelerating his career, while the wife is longing to start having children. They had always thought it was ideal to have 4 wonderful would-be grandparents nearby who are so willing to help with home life. Now they have a dilemma of conflicting desires.

Suddenly the husband decides to pull off the bulkhead for the cellar and put on an addition of a family sunroom.

***Is he saying something about their future?
Should she just quietly enjoy the shift in energy?***

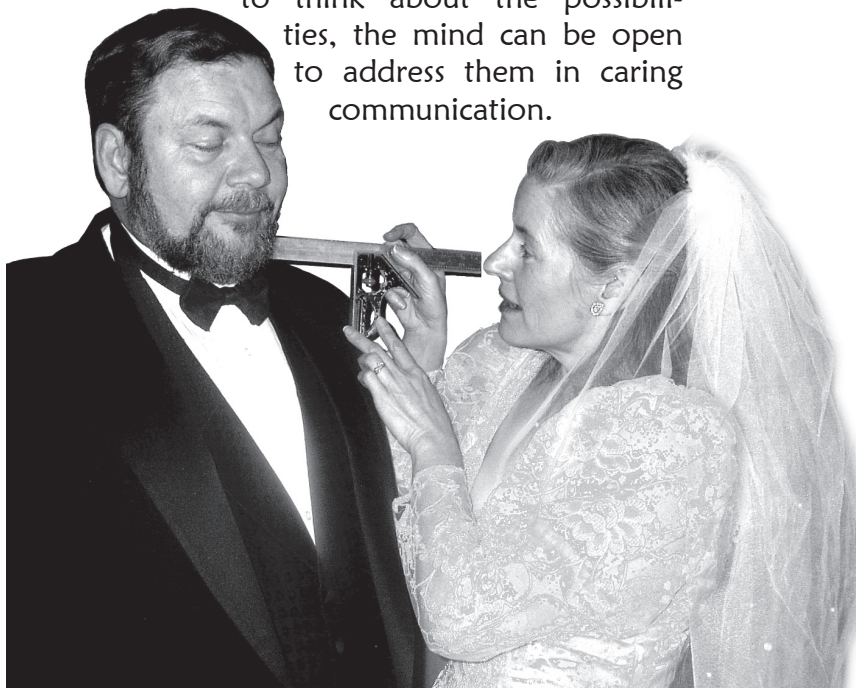
And another ~

A recent widower decides to carve up the family home into apartments. He had some paint in the basement and painted over all the wallpaper in most of the house and constructed extra doors wherever he could. His children who live nearby drive by and see many boxes on the curb and a garage sale happening, with much furniture in the driveway.

Is there a concern about how things are going for the elderly gentleman?

What do these situations mean?

Could be many things. Yet if one takes a moment to think about the possibilities, the mind can be open to address them in caring communication.



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Let's take these one by one ~

The uncommitted couple

In the first example of the uncommitted couple, it is apparent that the couple is either making a statement about investing further in a relationship together, or perhaps they are exceedingly impulsive and jump into things past their emotional depth.

If they are just impulsive, it would be a good thing to slow down the action, and at least ask – “Regardless of how things work out between us, is it a good idea to do this?” And, while some things can go more smoothly if you just don’t ask, under these circumstances one can at least ask the question internally. And -- if you are satisfied with the answer inside, then forge on! A benefit to continuing could be that if you work together and use team-building activities, you should know more down the road than you do now about each other and may be better able to determine your commitment then.

If the activity is actually a statement of deeper caring and commitment, it may be good to acknowledge it to yourself and begin to address it gently in conversation, allowing yourselves to deepen your layers of communication while renovating. You will surely need to sort out many things if you are to remain together, and remaining quiet about major issues rarely leads to smart results.

The conflicting desires

The husband's sudden apparent investment in the homestead makes it appear that the wife has 'won,' yet we should be cautious with this interpretation. While she may be content to enjoy his change of heart, the cost to the husband could be shifted to an installment plan with a hidden balloon payment, with a large balance payment due later that creeps up and surprises you many years later. What are the prospects for his career now?

If it was an important part of his identity and sense of achievement, and if she cares about him, should she want to know what happened to that dream? Did he give it up? It could be very unhealthy to surrender such an important part of himself. He could feel defeated and resentful – and that can be caustic in a marriage. And if he lets those feelings build up, that same balloon could pop at another time – causing the family much disruption and unhappiness.



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They really do need to talk about his goals, how he feels, and why he has apparently changed his mind.

If he has had a great realization of family priorities in his life and this decision is made in strength, then talking about this with his wife will deepen their bond and intimacy.

It is rarely good to be in a win-lose situation, but much better to talk & blend each of your goals to create a new set as you grow together.

And what about ~

The elderly widower

This fella appears to be energetic – we can give him that. Yet how is it that so much has happened with a beloved father at this vulnerable time and the kids don't know it? Perhaps this is a wake-up call to spend more time with him and help him sort through his decisions and his solutions.

Maybe he is feeling abandoned and angry with them, and is tossing his possessions out of anger. He could be quite sorry later if he has a change of heart and wants to review old pictures of young family days, or if he wants to sit in familiar places on the familiar furniture. In a better mood he might even want to pass some things along to the grandchildren.

It may be a long time before he forgives his negligent children. But it is human to make mistakes and overlook others when we expect and hope that all is well. Most of us know very little about grieving and would be unaware of the needs and stages one experiences. If you feel this story hits

you square between the eyes – alright, now do something about it.

Life has many wake-up calls, and the words, “I’m sorry” are some of the greatest words in our language. Just reach over with your caring hand and tell him you want to help out. He will stay angry a while and it is important that you don’t react, but remain true to the love you intend to share with him. Try changing the subject, giving a hand, and sitting it out together. The storm can’t last forever; as they say in Nebraska, “There’s only so much rain.”



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The point for you

The whole point is that it is just pretty important to prepare your heart for conversations about these types of things. You will need to consider and own your piece of the situation - what the person is responding to in you – and that can be challenging. You will also need to consider the ways in which the action you question is related to the person you care about – and warm your heart with compassion for their needs, even if they are quite different from your own. It is kind of like stretching before running – you want to make sure that you are limber & ready to extend yourself so you can receive the messages that are communicated to you in the choices of projects at your house. Then you begin the gentle process of talking about the various possibilities and how both of you can share your perspectives and accept each other with love.

Notes from Why this Project

<i>First, cover the right side of this table</i>	Yes, Cover this side first
1. Notice or consider which of these might be happening in your situation:	2. Now, consider these questions for the items you checked. And, think them through before going to talk with your partner.
Reconciliation	Am I holding onto old anger? (Need to let it go) Consider what might be the next steps
Amends	Say "Thank you"
Selfish?	Does the project actually answer needs expressed previously?
Commitment	Will the project take longer than our relationship? Do I want to talk about this?
Generous Sacrifice	What are they losing? What is the cost to them?
Needing Acknowledgment	What feelings are they needing to vent? What do I appreciate about my partner?
Rebellion	What could be improved in our methods of decision-making?
Retaliation	Think - what have I done that got this going? Some opportunities to talk about it in the next few days are:
<i>Now, go ahead and uncover the other side, and consider...</i>	Take some time before going to your partner with these thoughts. You will know when you are ready when you have a kindly view of them and are ready to talk gently.

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