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## Why Your Spouse Won't Listen

*This is Stay Happily Married #122, "Why Your Spouse Won't Listen."*

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Lee Rosen:

I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. You know, we hear all the time about how important communication is to a relationship. Well, duh. But sometimes, even when you're really trying to communicate and express your love for your partner, your message just doesn't get through. I'm not sure if that's because of the way we're talking or the way they're listening; we'll find out.

I've got an expert in the studio with me today, Sarah DeNome. Am I saying that right? Yes. Good. She's here with us today to tell us something about communicating your love and what steps you can take to better understand not just your partner but also yourself.

Sarah's a licensed clinical social worker with eight years of experience. She started her own practice, DeNome Alliances Counseling Center, which now has locations in Raleigh and in Holly Springs, North Carolina.

Let me tell you, if you're like me, whenever I'm listening to these shows if I'm sitting in front of my computer I want to look at the website. And so I'm putting a link to that in the show notes, but let me mention the address for the website. It's [DeNome-Alliances.com](http://DeNome-Alliances.com). So you can check that out while we're listening.

Now, the good news is not only is she an expert with experience in the field, she's also happily married and is really close to her family.

I think that's always good evidence that you know what you're talking about.

Sarah, welcome to the show.

Sarah DeNome: Thank you for having me today.

Lee Rosen: Well, I'm jazzed about this, talking about the whole communication thing and what helps spouses listen and understand. And my wife just doesn't listen, I think; that's my problem. If she would listen better, I think we'd get along a lot better than we do.

What I want to know from you as the expert is, why is communicating love in particular so important? And what does that really mean? What are we talking about?

Sarah DeNome: Well, when we say "communicating love," there's all these catch phrase, like, what is my love language and how can I express that? And so what we're talking about today is based on the five love languages, and that's how we express love and how we receive messages of love from other people, whether it's through physical touch, whether it's through words of encouragement and affirmation, whether it's through gifts, whether it's through acts of service, or whether it's through special quality time together.

Lee Rosen: Okay. Let me slow you down. I have a friend that's always talking about this languages of love thing and I had no idea -- I don't listen. It's like, you talk; I'll just sit here and eat lunch. So this languages of love thing comes from somewhere, is that right? Because you're laying out the five things. Where are you getting that?

Sarah DeNome: Correct. It's based on Gary Chapman's *Love Languages*.

Lee Rosen: Okay. So this is some love guru --

Sarah DeNome: Correct.

Lee Rosen: -- who has kind of worked -- okay.

Sarah DeNome: Yes.

Lee Rosen: And so he's got these five things. And is the basic idea that these five languages -- run through them again real quick. What are the five?

Sarah DeNome: It's basically five categories of how you want love and appreciation communicated to you from your partner. And probably it's how your gut sends out to other people. So the five categories are: gifts,

acts of service, quality time, physical touch, and words of encouragement and affirmation. And I'll actually go into each category to help understand, because those are pretty broad statements.

Lee Rosen: And so is the idea that different people need different ones of these? Is that sort of --

Sarah DeNome: Exactly. Each morning when somebody wakes up, they choose to give and receive love that day. And so your initial reaction is to fall back on what is innate to you, how we communicate -- and we talk the way that we want to be spoken to.

So for example, if my love language is acts of service, then I'm going to give my partner acts of service. So I'm going to do the dishes that day for them to show them that I love and appreciate them. But if my partner's language back to me is physical touch, they may not even notice that I did the dishes that day.

And that's where it can lead to problems is because if you're not noticing and you're not communicating in the same language and understanding your partner's language, it can lead to the miscommunications, feeling unappreciated, detaching from your partner, and the arguments of, "Well, I did the dishes today and you didn't even say thank you."

Lee Rosen: Right. It's so funny because that is my -- I do do the dishes and I do think I should be appreciated and I'm really not. But all kidding aside, so if my wife doesn't care that I did the dishes, what you're saying is that I'm giving something that is in my language of love. I think giving gifts -- I guess that would be the category it falls into?

Sarah DeNome: It would fall into --

Lee Rosen: Or doing service, you said?

Sarah DeNome: -- acts of service. Yes.

Lee Rosen: Acts of service. Okay. So I'm delivering on my thing that I think should get me points.

Sarah DeNome: Correct.

Lee Rosen: And she doesn't buy into that language of love. Which is kind of a hard way to say that, but she doesn't buy into that. So I'm sending the service and she's not receiving it.

Sarah DeNome: Correct. She just views it as a task that you did. She does not view it as a task that you did in order to show love and appreciation for her. So she sees it and she's like, "Oh, great. The dishes are done." But she doesn't associate it with, "He did the dishes because he loves me and is trying to help me."

Lee Rosen: Ladies, if a guy does the dishes, trust me, it's in that language of love. I'm just saying. There's no reason we would do the dishes otherwise. I mean, that's just a fact. That is the way we roll.

Okay. So why don't people just know what language of love they're dealing with from when you're dating? How come that isn't already happening?

Sarah DeNome: Because it's this new concept, a new catch phrase. And we go through our lives and we do these things and we think to ourselves, "I'm showing this person that I love them. Of course they see it." Because if they were to be doing the same thing back to us, we would see it. So then it falls into "do unto others how you would have done to you," and that's more engrained in who we are as a society.

So we think we're sending out the appropriate message and think that we're going to get that back in return. And then when we don't, that's where we get disappointed. And so it's learning a new way. It's like if your partner speaks and hears in French but you speak and hear in Spanish. If you want that partnership to work, you have to learn French and they have to learn Spanish and you have to be willing to speak that to each other.

Lee Rosen: Okay. Before we go too deep into this, let's run through the five again and just kind of one at a time. Fill me in on what they all are, because I guess if we're going to talk about this we need to understand each other's language of love.

Sarah DeNome: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: So what's the first one?

Sarah DeNome: So one category is quality time. So that would be if a spouse says, "Oh, I planned a special day for us. Let's go to the park for the day and have a picnic, or let's sit by the fire and have a glass of wine." That's quality time.

Then we have acts of service, which is where they do something for you, whether it's your husband goes and gets the oil changed for you or the wife cooks the meal that day or housekeeping, things like that.

The other category is gifts. So that would be physical things, buying a shirt or a present, flowers, candies, whatever it is, but an actual gift.

Then we have physical touch. And physical touch goes from holding hands to cuddling on the couch to actual sex, anything in between, any kind of physical touch.

And then last is words of encouragement and affirmation, so things like saying, "You look beautiful today," or, "Man, I'm so proud of you for how great you did at work today. Your project that you put on was awesome," those kind of things.

Lee Rosen: Right. Okay. You know, it is interesting because as you say it I can see things that I think my wife values and doesn't value on that list. And so what you're saying is if I come to the table valuing one of them that she doesn't value and I think I'm doing a good job, she's just not hearing it. It's not working.

Sarah DeNome: Correct. She's not picking up on it. And then if you're not getting that feedback in return, then you start to feel like she doesn't understand; your needs aren't being met. And then that's when partners a lot of times start to detach or they get frustrated because they say, "I'm communicating this to you. I'm telling you what I need and you're not delivering it. You're not fulfilling my need."

Lee Rosen: Right. So I'm curious. So when people are coming to you, are you using this a lot in your practice, this approach to talking about and thinking about relationships?

Sarah DeNome: Yes. It's very -- once you break it down for them, it's so tangible and they can put themselves -- you can actually do the assessment and it's more tangible and they can say, "Okay. This is where I fall. This is what I need." And it helps break that barrier of miscommunication.

Lee Rosen: Right. That's interesting that you say it's more tangible because that's exactly what I was thinking is this starts translating this vague emotional love thing into behaviors and you really can start seeing, well, gosh, if this is her language and I'm not adding to the mix there, I need to start doing those dishes or whatever.

Sarah DeNome: Yes. Exactly.

Lee Rosen: I need to go buy the gifts.

Sarah DeNome: Yes.

Lee Rosen: Hit the mall.

Sarah DeNome: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. And I will say, I've been married for 20 years but I'm not 100 percent sure of those five things how I would rank each of the five for my wife. And it's funny because I'm not even 100 percent sure how I'd rank each of the five for me.

Sarah DeNome: Right. It is surprising when you take the assessment what actually comes out versus what your gut feeling is telling you. So it's important. It's things that you learn from childhood of models around you, how your parents expressed love, how it was expressed to you.

If when you were a child you got an A on a report card and your mom gave you a big hug, that's physical touch. Things like that. But if when you got an A on your report card and they bought you ice cream, that would be gifts. So it's engrained and it's a learned behavior throughout our lives.

Lee Rosen: Right. So are you seeing a lot of people that when they come in and start telling you how they're not getting along, does it sort of pop out of the conversation for you where you start seeing -- it's like, oh, these people are -- this is where they're not connecting because they're off on these things?

Sarah DeNome: Yes. A lot of times, yes. And both parties are frustrated because they do love each other, they want to meet each other's needs, and they're just missing each other. So they're both frustrated about, "Well, I am trying. I'm doing this. I did the dishes. I took the car to get the oil changed." And the wife's still going, "But I don't feel you understand. I don't feel loved and appreciated." So both parties get frustrated.

Lee Rosen: Right. Very interesting. So I think it's one of the most fascinating models that I've heard about. And it's funny because I've been hearing about it for years from this guy but I never had a clue what he was talking about and just wasn't really listening -- getting sort of what to do about that.

So when you have people that you detect -- I mean, I think you probably see people that have lots of issues that go way beyond this. I mean, somebody comes in and they've got a --

Sarah DeNome: Right. It's much more complex.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. But for an average couple, this seems like it really makes sense. Where do you start with them? How do you sort of -- you mentioned an assessment. What are you doing? How is that working?

Sarah DeNome: Well, the first step is for each of them to take the assessment to find out what their own love languages are and where they fall. And you can actually -- if you go to my website, I have the assessment posted if anybody would like to take it.

And you take the assessment, you find out where you rank, and then you exchange with your partner and you learn, okay, this is where theirs are. Maybe for them quality time is first and gifts is last, and for you maybe gifts is first and quality time is last. And right then and there you know, okay, these are the things that I need to do in order to speak my partner's love language; AKA, in order to meet my partner's needs so they know that they are loved and appreciated.

Lee Rosen: Right. So you kind of walk out -- you immediately at least have sort of a checklist of things that if you would do this, you're probably going to get better feedback from your spouse.

Sarah DeNome: Exactly. And that's why families and couples love it so much is because right after the first assessment there's a more clear understanding and they just kind of exhale. And you can just see their shoulders relax and everything because they say, "Oh, now I have direction. I felt so confused and frustrated this whole time. Now I have more clear direction and actual behaviors that I can do. I know the next morning when I wake up, instead of doing the dishes, instead I'll go over and give her a hug in the morning and that's the thing that she'll appreciate most."

Lee Rosen: Do you get feedback from people that -- because women are complicated. And do you ever get people -- especially women, I would imagine -- but feedback that, "He's just gaming the system"? It's like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. He knows now that I need a hug, so he comes over and gives me a hug. But he doesn't really mean it."

Sarah DeNome: If he didn't mean it, he wouldn't do it.

Lee Rosen: Okay.

Sarah DeNome: Men are simple.

Lee Rosen: We'll just put that in an endless loop on the audio here. "Men are simple. Men are simple." You're going to get nailed with that one.

Sarah DeNome: And people are simple overall. If we really don't want to do something, we're not going to do it. The reason that you're in the marriage and you're in the partnership is because you love that person. You want to make them happy. You want to see them fulfilled. So it's just you knowing how to do it. So it actually provides them with a roadmap of, okay, this is how I can show this person. If they didn't want to, they wouldn't do it.

Lee Rosen: Okay. I'll buy that. I mean, you're right; if I don't really want to do something -- I can't seem to ever get anybody to do anything they don't actually want to do. So yeah, I'll accept that.

Okay. So if all you have to do is do this assessment, figure out which language of love you need, tell your spouse and your spouse does the assessment and tells you which language of love they need -- well, before I even go that far let me ask you this. I assume some people are mixed?

Sarah DeNome: Correct. Yes.

Lee Rosen: High on one, low on another, but medium on a couple?

Sarah DeNome: Yep. Exactly. It can be a range of anything. And it's kind of interesting because when I first took it, I was high on three categories. And I thought, "Oh, no. My poor husband. He has got his work cut out for him." But then when I reassessed, it was actually a positive thing because then if he were to do any one of those three things, then I'm going to know that he loves and appreciates me.

So if you have things that are really close matched together, don't think of it as a bad thing. It actually is a positive thing because there's different ways that people can show you that they love and appreciate you.

Lee Rosen: Right. So I was imagining your husband having to show up, give you a hug, hand you flowers, and tell you how great you are all at once. It's like, this is too complicated.

Sarah DeNome: Yes. And it doesn't -- and that's the thing is that it doesn't have to be a checklist of, okay, I need to do everything on this love language list today. It's something that you put in your head and you make a conscious effort every day, "I'm going to choose to show my partner love in the way that they need it." And it can be one thing of a text message during the day of saying, "I'm thinking about you."

Lee Rosen: Okay. That makes sense. Where I was going before then, so we do these assessments; we figure out what we need, what our spouse



needs; and we try to do it. Where do you come in in our relationship? Like, why do I need more than just to go to your website?

Sarah DeNome: Because then it's a matter of implementing it, and that's where all the complexities of partnerships and marriages come into place.

Lee Rosen: It is, isn't it?

Sarah DeNome: Yeah.

Lee Rosen: You're right. Because knowing it and doing it are two different things.

Sarah DeNome: Exactly. The first step is just awareness. And once you're more aware of it, then you're more likely to put it into place. And awareness can take months or years. Who knows? Depending on the couple. And then the next step is actual implementation. And then the step after that is mastery, where you do these things without even thinking about it.

Lee Rosen: Right. That makes sense. So what are you seeing in your practice? Somebody comes in and you've done the assessment, you start talking about it and you're coaching them, guiding them every week on sort of throwing these behaviors into their relationship. And I guess you get a lot of -- you'll have arguments in your office, people get off on tangents and all that. But I assume you wouldn't be doing it for this long if it didn't work. I mean, are you hearing success stories?

Sarah DeNome: Yes. Definitely. And it is -- like we talked about, once you get in there then -- when they're in the room and they know the language and they've done the assessment, well, then all the other things come in of all the past arguments or past mistakes, things like that. And so that's where it becomes more difficult and you have to say, okay, well, what are we willing to do as a couple? Where are we willing to go with this? Are we willing to put away all the things from the past and say, this is where I'm willing to start from here? Or do the things from the past need to be worked through in order to get to that next stage?

Lee Rosen: Right. So what I'm kind of hearing from you is that working on getting the languages piece straight sort of gives you the -- it gives you some space and allows you to have some energy and some positive feedback so you can start working on sort of more -- the deeper, bigger issues. Am I hearing that right?

Sarah DeNome: Yes, that's correct. And that's because we're a society where actions speak louder than words. And so with this technique, it allows us to use actions in order to show our partner. So they're seeing basically immediate effort by the other person and vice versa. Whereas a lot of times, if you just come into therapy and you don't have more tangible techniques, you just -- couples start to feel like, "Well, we're still in this cycle. I'm not getting immediate relief."

We're a society of immediate results. And so even if the results or the immediate relief is minimal, that still re-energizes them to continue and to move forward and continue to work on the marriage.

Lee Rosen: There's something I read on -- I guess on your website that makes me wonder. You know, my gut reaction is get my wife to take the assessment, see what her language of love is, and love-bomb her in that area. Score a lot of points. I'm all about scoring points. I want everything to work. But I think I read that it's maybe even more important to figure out your own language of love first. Am I on track with that? And why would that be? Who cares what my language of love is?

Sarah DeNome: Because then you can fulfill it within yourself as well. If we know how to take care of ourselves first and get our own needs met, then we are happy from the beginning. And then that translates into other aspects of our lives: our husbands, our wives, our spouses, our kids, family, friends, everything. But we have to be able to take care of ourselves first. And the way to do that is to know how it is that you love yourself.

Lee Rosen: Okay. So take care of me first. You're my kind of therapist. I like that. Let's focus on me for a while. Okay. No. That makes sense. I think that's very rational.

So when somebody comes in and you sort of give them this framework for thinking about how to make things happier in their marriage, what is the timeframe that you're seeing positive things happening? Are they coming back next week with good stories?

Sarah DeNome: To be honest with you, it's usually by the end of that session.

Lee Rosen: Wow.

Sarah DeNome: Because the thing with therapy is it's so cathartic that just getting it out and having somebody sitting there understanding you and not judging you and being in it with you is so therapeutic within itself that you feel like, okay, someone understands me. Somebody is going to work with us to make this better. So even by the end of that

first session you feel more empowered. You feel like, I have a direction now. I have somewhere to go and I have somebody who understands and who's willing to work with us through this process.

Lee Rosen: Do you encourage people to go out and buy the book -- the Gary Chapman *Love Languages* book?

Sarah DeNome: If they want to, I encourage them. I send them in that direction as well as his website. Anything that couples are willing to do to improve it at their pace, I'm willing to do. But I also go at their pace and I don't want to overwhelm them with too much. So I kind of follow their lead when it comes to that.

Lee Rosen: Fantastic. Well, I really love the very -- as you described it -- tangible approach to working on this problem. And I think a lot of people will appreciate that as well.

Sarah, thank you for joining us today.

Sarah DeNome: Thank you so much for having me.

Lee Rosen: Go ahead and check out Sarah's website at [DeNome-Alliances.com](http://DeNome-Alliances.com). Learn more about Sarah's services. Take the assessment. What have you got to lose? I mean, I always like taking these online tests and see what happens. So find out what your love language is; that might tell you something you didn't know.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope that you will come back again next week. In the meantime, we very much appreciate all of your feedback and comments. You can reach us a couple of different ways. One is on our comment line at (919) 256-3083. You can also e-mail us at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com). We respond to all of the e-mails, so keep them coming.

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

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