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## Why Don't You Understand?

*This is Stay Happily Married #123, "Why Don't You Understand?"*

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Lee Rosen:

I'm Lee Rosen and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. We are here today by phone with Susie Leonard Weller. She's the author of *Why Don't You Understand? Improve Family Communication with the Four Thinking Styles*.

Susie's a certified thinking styles consultant and a life and spiritual coach who also teaches parenting and family management at the community colleges of Spokane.

As a working married woman with two children of her own, she knows how stressful things can get, especially when family members just don't seem to be on the same wavelength. It might feel like the different ways you think just don't match up and that it might be impossible to really understand each other. But Susie's going to show us that there is a rhyme and reason to the way we all think and she's going to help us learn how to improve our communication through these different thinking styles.

Susie, welcome to the show.

Susie Leonard Weller:

Hi, Lee. Great to be here.

Lee Rosen:

Well, I'm glad you could be here. And this whole idea of talking about how we think is really important because I

spend a lot of my time scratching my head, wondering how is it that they are thinking that?

Let me ask you, when you talk about thinking styles, when that comes up in your work, what do you mean? What are we talking about?

Susie Leonard Weller: Well, Lee, just like we have a preferred hand to write with, I think we also have a preferred thinking style. And some people are going to be more left-brained and they're going to make logical decisions with their head, and others are going to be more right-brained and make relational decisions with their heart or their gut instinct.

And so I'm actually a certified thinking styles consultant through Hermann International, which is located in North Carolina not too far from you, in Lake Lure.

Lee Rosen: Oh, okay.

Susie Leonard Weller: And they've been studying and applying brain research for over 30 years for individuals, couples, and organizations to help us really understand and work with each other more effectively.

Lee Rosen: Interesting. So do they sort of have a different -- I guess you're calling it "thinking styles." What are the styles that we're talking about?

Susie Leonard Weller: Well, we're looking at four of them. And if you were to imagine like a plus sign with four corners, in the top left corner we're going to call them the logical; and this is the one that makes decisions more looking at the facts, the numbers, the research. And on the bottom left hand, which is also left brain, is this more practical that gets the information but then says, "What are we going to do with it?" and wants to implement it. They like to plan and they look at the details.

And the right brain, we look at the top right-hand corner and that's going to be the more creative, thinking outside the box; what are some options? And in the bottom right we're going to look at the relational that focuses on who does this matter and who's important in my life and how do I make decisions that are really meeting my needs and other people's needs in a respectful way?

August 30, 2010 - Why Don't You Understand?

Lee Rosen: So where do these thinking styles come from? Is it just something we're born with?

Susie Leonard Weller: Yeah. I think so. There's always a debate between nature and nurture, but most of the research right now is suggesting that at least 30 to 40 percent of how we're born is our inborn temperament or thinking style traits. And with practice we can certainly adjust them, but I think it's best to kind of work with what we've got.

Lee Rosen: Got you. How do you know which thinking style you are?

Susie Leonard Weller: Well, there's lots of different ways. Certainly Hermann International has a thinking style assessment that they do with individuals, but also with couples and at work. And in my book what I -- understand, I've got a quiz for people to identify their own thinking style but also identify their child's thinking style.

And I think there's some practical tools that people give all the time, both in their language, in their body style, in the words that they use and the kinds of hobbies and activities all give us clues about what is our preferred unique way of thinking and doing things.

Lee Rosen: So in the average family, do families tend to be all of one thinking style, or do people end up being all different sort of things living in the same house?

Susie Leonard Weller: Typically opposites attract and then they drive each other crazy later down the road. Because eventually, after the newness has worn off, we often want people to think and do things the way we do. So sometimes I think couples that blow the early -- dating kind of wears off when we're doing normal every day things and it's like, well, why didn't you take out the garbage and why didn't you think about this other option? Why are you boxing me in? So you can start to see some of the diagonal opposites at play.

And then with kids, imagine for a moment that you've got parents that might have worked out their own differences. And some kids will think like one parent and not like the other. And so that's why sometimes I think parents might have an easier bond with one child who thinks like they do. And often, or perhaps the opposite, is that they do think alike and so they're butting heads in terms of arguments.

Sometimes I think even children will feel like, "Hey, was I adopted? I don't belong in this family. I'm really into drama and art and everyone else is into sports and fixing things. And do I belong?"

So I think it's important for parents as well as for partners is to be able to appreciate what they have and learn how to work with it more effectively.

Lee Rosen: So it sounds like what you advocate is figuring out what your thinking style is and then you have to sort of accept that everybody in the house might be different. And then you've got to figure out how to work with somebody who has a different thinking style. Am I on the right track?

Susie Leonard Weller: Yes, you are.

Lee Rosen: Okay.

Susie Leonard Weller: Yeah. So part of this is really looking at how to improve our communication by really recognizing. Our differences can be shifted. So for example, if I'm normally right-handed and I break my arm, I could do things with my left hand but it's never going to be quite as easily done as if it is in my naturally preferred style.

Lee Rosen: Right. Okay. So you're always going to be a little stuck in your own place. But if you get it, then you're in a much better position for dealing with that other person.

So give me a feel for -- you've helped a lot of people with this. Give me a feel for once we know our thinking style -- and I guess most significantly we know our spouse's thinking style -- how do we improve our lives together?

Susie Leonard Weller: Well, first of all, I really think it's important when I want to look at improving my communication, which I think is the core of any healthy relationship, whether it's at home or at work. And so part of it I think is to stop taking differences personally.

One of the interesting research I found in my book -- and I have little brain facts all the way through -- is from Dr. Richard Haier of University of California, Irvine, from the late 1980s. And when he was doing research on energy in the brain, he noticed that we're literally biologically wired to

think differently and that it takes 100 percent more energy to think in our non-preferred styles.

Which is why sometimes when my husband asks me to do a project that he can just do in his sleep -- he's just this logical, creative guy who works well with tools and is asking me to do a project, and spatially I'm just feeling like I'm just impaired trying to do something that would take -- it's taking me hours to do something he can do literally in minutes.

And so it's really recognizing that, well, why can't you get this? Well, really it's taking me tons more energy to think in a different style.

Lee Rosen:

Wow. That makes a lot of sense. But I bet when you know that you could be, I guess, communicating in a different thinking style and trying to make your message receptive, that sounds terrific except that a lot of these problems come up when we're upset with each other or tired or -- we just don't always have the energy. I suspect that makes it a little more challenging.

Susie Leonard Weller:

It does. And you said something really wise, Lee, in that when we're tired we do have less energy. And I think that's when arguments and conflicts surface more easily and quickly because the brain literally is taking more energy to access all four thinking styles when we need them.

I kind of describe them as being like four rooms at a house at a party. And people like to hang out in one room over another. But can I go to any room that I need to to get that skill when I need it?

So for example, in terms of parenting, I might be a more naturally listen to the kids, hear their side of the story, be empathic for them, which is that relational style. But gosh, if they really do not honor house rules or they've done something that they really need to follow through in terms of consequence, I've got to move to that diagonal opposite logical style and hold firm and not let kids walk all over me. And that's not easy to do, but I know that that's important to do and I will do what needs to be done.

Or vice versa. Perhaps I'm a practical, scheduled kind of person and my kids are really -- they like to be more flexible. So when I'm trying to do homework with them, can I do it in a more playful way versus in the style I would normally do

my own work, so that they get it? And that does take more energy.

And that's why, again, I think we have more conflicts when people are exhausted and we're tired because our brain literally downshifts to that more emotional brain that just reacts rather than respond in clear ways.

Lee Rosen:

You've mentioned the book a couple of times and I'm curious. I can imagine -- and I have not read the whole thing, but I imagine that the first piece of it is figuring out what your thinking style is. But what do you do for folks that are reading in terms of really making it practical for them to be able to take that information and put it to work in their homes?

Susie Leonard Weller:

Well, part of it is -- when I was working with Parenting Press about it, they said the book should really reflect all four thinking styles. So that there's pieces in there that are brain research and facts, that are short and to the point. There's practical applications all the way through in terms of scenarios, everything from how to kids get to do homework or get to bed or toilet training. There's techniques about how to listen and develop emotional intelligence. And then there's things about looking at new applications all the way through in terms of that more creative style.

When I look at some practical kinds of things in terms of helping families apply this, one of the things I think is most helpful is that I have lists and really short -- you can just pick up a chapter and read just a few pages and have handy hints right then and there.

So for example, one of the things I found in my own life is that my husband's this more creative style and I was the opposite in terms of practical. So when we wanted to go on dates when our kids were little, we would often not go out because he wanted to be flexible and wait until the last minute and see what he felt in the mood to do and by then it was too late to get child care.

So one of the practical things was -- and I started to learn about this -- is that I would say, "You know what? Let's put on the calendar a date. I'll get child care, line up all the practical details." And this is where I needed to shift is I needed to then be flexible in the moment about what it is we would actually do. But I would have my need met of at least

having on the calendar something I could look forward to and knew that all the details were lined up so that we could go out. And that was a nice way of blending both of our styles.

Lee Rosen: Right. That makes a lot of sense. Now, you've talked a lot about how thinking styles impact communication, and I think that's very interesting. But that's not the only way that thinking styles impact your life at home. Stress comes into this too, right?

Susie Leonard Weller: Yes.

Lee Rosen: How does that play out?

Susie Leonard Weller: Well, as I mentioned, the brain has really three major layers. And the first layer is this more automatic just protect and defend. We don't even think about it. If I'm walking with my kids in a parking lot and a car's coming, I'm not going to debate things; I'm going to grab them, make sure they're safe.

The second layer is this more emotional layer that decides if something was a threat or not.

And then this higher thinking level of brain is where we talk about the four thinking styles.

Now, under stress what happens, instead of thinking out of our more problem-solving creative brain, we downshift to that emotional, defensive, protect-and-defend layer. And that's when the trouble really begins because if it looks like a threat, feels like a threat, it is a threat, and perhaps my emotions have really clouded if -- and that's when I start to take the differences personally rather than understand that it's different thinking styles at work.

Lee Rosen: Right. So it really does make it challenging to put the material to work if you're dealing with a stressful situation.

Susie Leonard Weller: Yes. And that's why I use a process I call NARN, which is kind of like shifting from "darn" to "narn." The N stands for Notice; and this is in that top left logical quadrant that's noticing. It's noticing my thoughts, my bodily queues, my triggers, my emotions, and paying attention to them so they don't get the best of me.

And then I move to the diagonal opposite because this is really a whole brain style that's based on some work in terms of decision making from Brain Gym that integrates both sides of the brain. And I begin to look at accepting. Okay. In this moment, wow, these are all the feelings I have and I'm not going to deny or dismiss them. But understanding my feelings doesn't mean I have to act on them. So I am acknowledging them and accepting this as the current reality.

And then I move into the R, which is that reflect and look at my options, which is that creative corner in the top right. And I say, hmm, are there other ways I could respond to this situation, not just react to it?

And then I move to the diagonal -- it's a cross-cross sequence -- I move to the bottom left corner, which is that practical. And I say, okay, brainstorming is great, but now it's time to make a decision. So I'm going to focus on what is one thing I could do in this moment that would be a helpful response either to calm myself down or to calm others down or make a decision that would be helpful? And when I do that, typically every time I implement a decision I get new information. And that moves me back up to that logical corner.

And if you just do this like a sequence with your finger, you would notice that it's like infinity symbol or the sideways 8, that all four thinking styles contribute to a whole-brained or better decision, versus only accessing one or two of the styles.

Lee Rosen:

Right. That makes sense. It's very interesting because I feel like even talking with you today that you're using the different thinking styles as you talk to each member of our audience. And you're sort of presenting this in lots of different ways, which makes a lot of sense. I mean, I think it's very smart because my tendency would be to present it all in the way I think and not take advantage of all the other ways people can receive information, I guess. That's terrific.

Susie Leonard Weller:

Well, I appreciate that. You know, one of the things I encourage people to do is think about thinking styles as like a foreign language. And that when I'm speaking to someone where English is not their first language or dominant



language, I'm tempted to get louder in my preferred language, versus shift gears to theirs.

So one of the things I do when I'm with my husband in particular, we've been married for 26 years; I've had lots of practice here in terms of different squabbles. And one of them is recognizing that when I'm upset about something, venting about it in my louder relational style does not help him in his more logical style hear me. So I'm better off to maybe vent in my journal or get my feelings out that way. And then when I speak to him, speak to the point, speak with as little emotion as possible, stay on task, and be ready for problem solving. And that I find is helpful, of course, when I remember to do it.

Lee Rosen: Right. Can he ever see your wheels spinning and say something like, "Susie, you're just using that thinking styles stuff on me"?

Susie Leonard Weller: My kids do too. We kind of laugh about it. But in fact, I have found in practice -- one time I was complaining about my job or my day or something and I just noticed that he was just moving into that problem solving, let's fix it, "Well, Susie, you should do this; you should do that." And I found myself getting more and more irritated.

And finally I said, "Mark, all you need to do is just let me know you understood my frustrations." It's like, read the cue card. "Susie, it must be frustrating." You don't have to fix it. You don't have to agree with it. You just have to let me know my feelings were heard and I'll be satisfied.

And when I tell him and cue him, in respectful ways, that that's all he needs to do, my needs are met and his needs are met, because he wanted to be helpful but he's learning how to be helpful in a way that I get.

Lee Rosen: Right. It is funny how even if you have to tell somebody what need you need met, if they meet it, it really does -- it addresses it. And it would seem a little crazy, but it does work, doesn't it?

Susie Leonard Weller: It does.

Lee Rosen: Well, I cannot thank you enough for coming in and talking with us today. I really appreciate you explaining your book

August 30, 2010 - Why Don't You Understand?

and I'm looking forward to spending some more time with it. Thank you so much.

Susie Leonard Weller: Thank you. And I'd like to be able to give a special offer to your listeners today.

Lee Rosen: Terrific.

Susie Leonard Weller: But I realize we didn't have a lot of time to get into specific tips about how to calm ourselves in stressful moments. And I've developed a free report with 30 tips about how to calm ourselves in stressful moments that are organized by each thinking style. And if people contact me either at my phone or e-mail, I'd be happy to send this free report to your listeners.

Lee Rosen: That is fantastic. We'll put a link in our show notes and make sure it's easy to get up with you.

If you haven't read the book, you ought to. It's *Why Don't You Understand? Improve Family Communication with the Four Thinking Styles*. You can find it at [ParentingPress.com](http://ParentingPress.com) or through Amazon. Easy to find. We'll put a link to it in the show notes. You should definitely check it out. And it really does, I think, present things in a clear, fun way. It's just a great resource for anybody looking to solve communication problems in their family.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope you will join us again next week. We'd love to hear your comments or your feedback about this episode or any episode. Couple of ways to get a hold of us. You can reach our listener comment line at (919) 256-3083 or you can e-mail us at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com).

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

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