

Marriage Partnership

Quarterly Series

ARTICLE

Men Are Computers, Women Are Cell Phones

Can we stay connected?

By Rhonda Rhea, for the study, "Grace Connects Men and Women"

"I don't know how we're going to sort out tonight's schedule," I gushed as my husband, Richie, came through the door. "You're late—and Andrew has a game an hour away. One of us has to get him there by 7:00. Jordan has a game here. Kaley is cheering at Jordan's game, but she also has a game right before his. And it's the same time as Andrew's away game. That's also the time Allie and Daniel are supposed to have practice at ..."



I hadn't even gotten to the dinner dilemma part of my list, when I knew by Richie's wide-eyed, zombie stare that he'd shut down somewhere just after "You're late."

I've seen the look before.

How many other wives have seen their husbands processing information when suddenly their "screen saver" kicks on? My husband is able to process a lot of information. I know—I can dish it out in hefty chunks. There are times, however, when something seems to happen to his internal processor. Everything locks up and I feel as if I need to, well, reboot. It's as if I'm living with a computer!

Funny thing is, Richie tells me he's living with a cell phone.

The night he arrived home late, he'd had a long problem-filled day at work. He'd been looking forward to coming home, to his refuge where he could simply veg out and not have to think.

As he opened the front door, his peace bubble exploded into an outline of the evening's agenda. I'd been poised at the door, ready for the attack. Every word about every game and every place the kids had to be came at him nonstop.

Richie told me later that my actions were akin to settling into a comfy seat at a movie theater only to have his cell phone blast.



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I'm a "cell phone"? I thought. And I realized I can go off unexpectedly and sometimes at the most inopportune moments. I'm also faithful to keep "calling" until I'm answered. *Oh no!* I thought. *I am a cell phone!*

Different wiring

I don't know about that whole Mars/Venus thing, but I think I can safely say men and women certainly operate on different hardware. We're wired differently. To me, it seems as if men are computers and women are, well, cell phones. The computer's communication is most often a one-way communiqué. Cell phones, on the other hand, require two-party participation. They're all about communication.

Dr. James Dobson hits on the wiring problem in his book *Love for a Lifetime*. He writes: "Research makes it clear that little girls are blessed with greater linguistic ability than little boys, and it remains a lifelong talent. Simply stated, she talks more than he." Dobson suggests that God may have given Mrs. Cell Phone 50,000 words per day while Mr. Computer may average 25,000. By the time he's walking up the driveway to his relaxing safe place, he's most likely used 98 percent of his daily word store—he's practically in "sleep mode" already—that mode that's used after the screen saver's been on for a while. She, on the other hand, is ready to give him most of her 50,000—and she wants a similar number from him. But all she gets is a busy signal. How can we find common ground?

Getting connected

Cell phones and computers do have something in common. They both need a connection, just as husbands and wives need a connection. And isn't it interesting that techno-smart people are finding more and more ways computers and cell phones can work together to make life better? I was stuck at an airport recently and occupied myself by watching the lady next to me check her e-mail and send out a message or two—all on her cell phone!

Powerful connection can result in a powerful, productive, and satisfying marriage. Try these six couple-tested ideas to find your own techno-compromise. You can get connected—even in a technically challenged relationship.

1. Season your speech with grace. Sarah was at her wit's end. She tried talking to her husband, Jeff, but found him clamming up during almost every conversation. After hearing a sermon about kindness and the art of listening, Sarah did a communication evaluation on herself. She discovered she was dominating most of their conversations. She also noticed she was spending a big percentage of their talks crabbing at Jeff.

The sermon that impacted Sarah's speech included Colossians 4:6: "Let your conversation be always full of grace." She realized that to promote healthy



communication in her marriage, she needed to get rid of the static—any unkind, graceless speech. She's working on incorporating more grace in her conversations and becoming a good listener as she works toward encouraging Jeff to share with her more openly.

2. Be open and honest. Angie's communication struggle was different. She couldn't figure out why her husband, Bill, didn't clue in to her signals. She thought he should be sensitive enough to pick up on hints for attention. When he didn't, her "silent treatment" response only complicated the communication glitches.

After Angie shared her disappointment with a mentor, she learned that computers can't process information they haven't been given. Instead of giving Bill the "Well, if you really understood me, you'd automatically know I need you to listen now" speech, she's working more on her ability to lovingly level with him.

3. Let your computer be a computer. Lynn spent the first three years of her marriage trying to remake her husband, Doug. Doug resented her motherly corrections and they argued at almost every encounter. When they decided to talk to a counselor, Lynn was sure he could whip Doug into shape. Was she surprised when the counselor hinted that she was a big part of the problem! The counselor encouraged her to let her husband be himself. She had essentially been trying to make a computer into a cell phone.

Lynn is learning instead to accept their differences, including what she once thought were Doug's "weaknesses." She's finding that some of the characteristics she'd been harping on as his weaknesses are actually some of the same ones she considered his strengths when they were dating. Lynn turned over a new leaf in her marriage when she decided to enjoy Doug "as is."

4. Make God your source of fulfillment. Sue had become a smotherer. If her husband, Mike, didn't hang on her every word and dote on her when they were together, she interpreted his inattention as indifference. So she pouted their time away. And Mike was wearing out.

After yet another evening of pouting, Sue finally called her mom for advice. Sue's mother said, "Husbands aren't meant to supply every emotional need. Only God can do that." Sue's mom told her she was putting a heavier load on Mike than a mate can handle. It was just too much for his mainframe to manage. Sue's mom reminded her that the Bible tells us to "Cast all your anxiety on [God], because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Sue has seen her marriage become stronger and less frustrating as she has deepened her prayer life and her Bible study time, and strengthened her dependence on God. And she's finding great blessing in living in a virtually pout-free household!



5. Make room for friendships. Sue also discovered she'd neglected her need for friendships with other women. She was thrilled when she discovered she could unload several thousand words on her mom or another interested friend (and let her friend unload a significant percentage of her 50,000 word store too). Sue found it was great not only to get another woman's take, but to give Mike a break. Since women have a greater need for conversation, Sue and her friends help each other out in the dialogue area—person to person and phone to phone.

6. Grow in Christ together. As Sarah and Jeff have worked on better techno-compromise, they've found that spending time praying and studying God's Word together builds conversation that really counts. They find they're both more ready to compromise and give to meet the needs of the other as they're aiming at becoming more like Christ.

What a great target for each of us—computers and cell phones alike. As we continually ask God to impact our marriages, we can become better talkers and better listeners, hearing him through his Word and prayer.

Can you hear him now? Good.

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