

HE ZIGS, SHE ZAGS

Get Your Communication on the Same Path



He Zigs, She Zags

Get Your Communication on
the Same Path

by Tony & Alisa DiLorenzo

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He Zigs, She Zags: Get Your Communication on the Same Path

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Choose Your Battles, Choose Your Time

Open Up and Be Vulnerable

Use I Feel

Palms Up

Listen to Understand, Not to Interrupt

Extend Grace

Questions and Answers

Introduction

Tony: Welcome to He Zigs, She Zags, Get Your Communication On The Same Path. Whether you're on the giving end or receiving end of the silent treatment, shutting down, constant bickering, or just too tired or busy to talk or a number of other communications issues, it is not healthy for your marriage. When any of these happen, you close your heart and decide not to interact with your spouse. You are sending a message that you don't care about them.

During this workshop, we are going to share with you strategies that you can use to stop the constant bickering, move past shutting down, end the silent treatment, as well as address other communication issues you may face.

What's coming up?

We have introductions. We have the COUPLE Communication Method and we'll end with the Q&A session. Here's our desire for you during this workshop. To equip you with the tools you need to get your communication on the same path.

Nice to meet you. We are Tony –

Alisa: And Alisa DiLorenzo –

Tony: Those are our two kids, Alex and Abby. We've been married 17 years and understand communication struggles. We've been there ourselves over the last 17 years.

Alisa: I was known in our marriage affectionately as the power outage. I grew up watching my mom, when she would get mad at my dad, she would shut down like the biggest electricity outage you ever saw in your own cities. When I brought this to our marriage, it led to a lot of struggles because I avoided confrontation, I avoided discussions.

If I didn't like something, if I didn't like the way the conversation was going, I would just zip my lip, sit there with my arms crossed, and just wait it out until I had decided – completely arbitrarily – that the situation had blown over. If I didn't want to talk about it, we didn't bring it up again, and so we ended up having this giant elephant move into our marriage because of how I didn't handle communication.

Tony: And I, on the other hand, was the presser.

Got to know, got to know, got to know.

So as you could imagine, you have somebody, Alisa, who was a massive power outage, and I'm just pressing her and pressing her to answer my questions. It wasn't a good place at all, because we came from it from two different places, and both of these were indicative of our family, the role models that were played out in our own family.

So we had to learn how to interact with each other in our marriage with somebody who shuts down, power outage. I mean, I used to tell her – and we laugh about it now – it was like a computer going down. My mistake was I just kept pressing her. I needed to know now how to fix

the problem. Instead of allowing her some grace and some time to think through, so she could process, I wouldn't allow that to happen.

Alisa: These are just two of the many communication issues that have played out in our own marriage, and I know there are those of you listening to this already that are probably either grinning, smirking, or even nudging your spouse as you're thinking oh, that sounds like us.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. We're really going to dig into this, and we're going to equip you with the tools you need to have, those tough talks, because let's face it, we're not having a conversation today about how you remind your spouse to bring home the milk.

We're talking about how you talk about things like your sex life, your finances, what's going on with your children or your parents, the things that really get to the heart of what's going on in your marriage.

Tony: These are statement that we hear from the ONE Family:

"I don't know where to start."

"Whenever I say we need to talk, he or she shuts down."

"We can't talk about these things around the kids."

"I always seem to bring things up at the wrong time."

Learning to communicate takes time and patience, especially when the two of you have been out of practice for so long.

Here's our first question for you guys: What's the biggest communication challenge that you and your spouse face? You can put that in over there on the left hand side. I'll be checking that, and we will start answering those as we see them.

COUPLE Communication Method. This is the meat of He Zigs, She Zags, Get Your Communication on the Same Path. What we're going to teach is how-to:

Choose Your Battles, Choose Your Time

Open Up and Be Vulnerable

Use I Feel, I Heard

Palms up

Listen to Understand, Not to Interrupt

Extend Grace

Throughout the workshop, I'll be sharing our experiences and others' as we have helped here at ONE Extraordinary Marriage. I'll also be monitoring the questions and answers that are coming in, but now I'm going to turn this over to Alisa. She's going to go over each one of these in depth so that you can get your communication on the same path.

**Choose Your Battles,
Choose Your Time**

Alisa: Choose Your Battles, Choose Your Time.

The first thing that has to happen in these conversations, and we often – for those of you that have listened to the podcasts – you’ve probably heard us talk about the State of Our Marriage conversation. This is the beginning of the State of Our Marriage conversation. You have to identify what it is that you want to discuss.

Our marriages are made up of so many different components. We have a financial component, a spiritual, recreational, emotional, communication, the kids, the in-laws, work, volunteering, church, all of these different things, and any one of them, or any five of them could be impacting what’s going on between the two of you on any given day.

The thing is, when you’re going to sit down and have a serious conversation about what’s going on, you need to be laser focused. Thinking through what is it that I want to talk to my spouse about is going to have an impact in a couple of different ways.

The first thing that it’s going to do is it’s going to help you stay on track during the discussion. If you decide that the two of you need to have a conversation about your sex life, this isn’t going to be the time that you talk about how much you’re spending on groceries or whether or not the two of you are going to church together.

You’re going to be talking about your sex life.

Letting your spouse know that you’re having that conversation about your sex life gives them the gift of understanding that you’re not going to spend three and a half hours talking about everything under the sun. Such as the trip you took two weeks ago, or how you felt about that trip, or how you felt about the last grocery trip.

It makes you very focused, because in our world, where we’re getting all of these different inputs, where so many people are expecting us to make decisions and to think about all of these different components of our lives all day long, to have a conversation that is singularly focused allows you and your spouse to both put your energy in one place.

Tony: Yeah, and it’s during this time that you set up how long you’re going to be discussing it.

Alisa: Tony and I receive hundreds of emails every single week in response to the question, “What is one thing that you would like to change in your marriage?” And I will tell you that probably, what do you think, ninety-five percent?

Tony: I’d say it’s in the ninety percentile.

Alisa: Ninety percent of those messages identify more than one thing that a couple would like to change in their marriage, and the reason for that is there is so much going on in your marriages, but you and your spouse can’t get distracted talking about communication and your sex life in the

same conversation, or your sex life and finances, or children and finances. You need to be focused on just one thing.

Tony: And this happens in our marriage, and we have learned to be able to say, “Hey, let’s reel this back in. What we’re talking about right now is our finances. We can’t be going off on rabbit trails. We can write that down for another day, another time.”

Alisa: And that’s a strategy that the two of you can use. When you’re having a conversation like this, keep a pad and paper next to you and just jot it down. If something comes up with finances, if something comes up with family but you’re talking about sex or vice versa, put it down, and say, “Honey, we are going to talk about this, but that’s not the focus of this particular conversation.”

Tony: Julie wrote in and said that the issue they face in their marriage when it comes to communication is acknowledging issues that are from childhood.

Alisa: And let’s face it, where and how we grew up impacts our marriages. I tell my coaching couples all the time that they are leaving the legacy for their children because we, as adults, we watched our parents and our grandparents and how they interacted.

We experienced things in our childhood, and being able to create a safe place – and we’re actually going to get to that in a couple steps here – we’ll address that particular issue. Thank you, Julie, for sharing that with us.

Second part of this is you’ve got to choose your time. Virtually everyone on this call, I’m sure, has something that looks similar to a calendar like this one on your phone, or maybe you still use a paper calendar. I only gave my paper calendar up a year ago. Now I can’t imagine not using my iPhone calendar.

You need to discuss the best day and time to talk. Here’s why. When your spouse walks in the door or picks up the phone and hears the phrase, “We need to talk,” they immediately shut down, because nothing good comes after the phrase, “We need to talk.”

Even if it is something good, by the time you’ve already processed that phrase, you’re already in a negative space. So what you need to do is just like you would do for a business meeting or a play date, you need to set a day and time to talk, and here’s what this does for your spouse.

It allows them not to be blind-sided by the conversation, or even to start the conversation when they’re tired, stressed, or distracted, even hungry.

I know there are times – Tony is a road cyclist, and there are times when he goes on a bike ride on Saturday mornings when our children get all kinds of ornery on me, and he comes home, and I just want to vent to him about the kids. If he does not eat first, the conversation goes poorly, and some of you have spouses that need to eat before the conversation can happen.

What I'm trying to establish here is that you want your spouse to be an active participant in the State of Our Marriage conversation. By checking with them to find out if a Tuesday or Thursday is better for them will start the conversation on the right path.

Here's what's going on with the kid's schedules or here's what's going on with the work schedules. Tell me the best day and time to talk. This isn't avoiding the conversation; it's setting the two of you up for success, and that's vital, because when we surprise our spouse, things can get ugly quickly, but by making the time a priority, you two define what's important in your marriage.

Tony: It also allows both of you to look at your calendars and find that time and date where you don't have a bunch of distractions. That is key, so you guys can pull yourselves away and go okay, we can make a half an hour of time right here, right now, let's get focused, whenever that date may be.

It's vital, folks. I know it from our own experiences and having done this many different ways and failing many, many a times is how we came to this, and every time we do this and put it on the calendar and determine how long it's going to be, that is when we have success.

This is when we have breakthroughs, and this is when you'll have a breakthrough.

Alisa: And Tony hit on a second part that's very important, in this choosing your time. You also have to put definition on the amount of time that you're going to talk. Some of you have spouses that can only do these serious conversations for 10 or 15 minutes.

Don't bore them with an hour conversation.

No matter how important it is, you've lost them after 15 minutes. If the conversation needs to be continued, then you say, "You know what? We're going to talk for 15 to 20 minutes. If we're not at a point of resolution, we're going to schedule another time."

This allows your spouse not to feel overwhelmed at the prospect of going on and on and on with the conversation.

Again, these tools empower both of you to come to the conversation in the best possible frame of mind and to make your marriage a priority. I know just from the emails we received prior to starting today that we have folks who are joining us from New Zealand and from the UK. Some of them have even adjusted their sleep so that they could make being on this workshop a priority. Some of you are sitting here on the West coast and it's 6:16 PM. That's in the middle of our nightly routine. You made a priority to interrupt dinnertime.

Some of you have made a priority to interrupt your sleep. Why? Because your marriage is important, and if your marriage is important, you will make setting a time and sticking to it a priority as well.

You also have to choose a place that's distraction free.

You can see this couple is trying to have a not-so-successful conversation in the middle of a restaurant. The wife is not having it at all, and I know, just like us, that your lives have a lot of distractions.

We hear from people all the time that when they try and sit down and have a conversation with their spouse, one eyeball is on the TV, one eyeball, or maybe both eyeballs, are on the iPad or the phone, or you just can't get them to even look at you because the kids are running around and you hear, "Mommy! Daddy! He did this! She did that!"

You've got all of this stuff happening.

The two of you are not going to have a conversation that is going to be meaningful when there are distractions around you. It's simply not possible.

You're going to look like this couple right here on the slide. When you're setting yourself up for success, you need to think about when the kids are not going to be home and where should you have this conversation.

It's one thing not to have the electronic distractions or the children distractions, but you also have to think about the weight of the rooms that you are choosing to have this conversation. I want to explain what I mean by that.

Many of the couples that reach out to ONE Extraordinary Marriage for help are having problems with their sexual intimacy. Wide range of what that means, but ultimately, there's something that's not working in the bedroom.

I was having a conversation with a wife the other day, and we were talking about their particular issue. She had this aha moment, and I could tell by her reaction.

I said, "What did you just figure out?"

And she said, "I think what you're trying to tell me is we shouldn't talk about sex in the bedroom."

"Bingo."

And here's why. When it comes to sex, your bedroom is a loaded place. There are all kinds of expectations. There are all kinds of disappointments. There have been hurts. There has been all of this energy wrapped up about your sex life in your bedroom.

The two of you want to talk about your sex life?

Do it in the living room. Go for a walk. Do it somewhere else.

Same thing for finances. A lot of couple discuss finances at the kitchen table because that's where they pay the bills. Get out of the kitchen for the financial talk.

You need to figure out if the room that you're planning on having the conversation in has any emotional weight to it, because if it does, that weight, that energy is going to impact how the two of you relate to one another. So thinking about what are the distractions and what is the emotional weight of a particular place.

One other thing that I do want to say is that if the two of you can get out and be physical, and by that I mean go for a walk, walk along the beach, sit in a park, be out in nature. Tony and I have found that to be some of our most successful conversations. There's something very grounding about being out in nature when you're having a talk that can be very emotional.

Tony: And as you're setting up this whole State of Our Marriage conversation, for those of you who have young kids, you're probably going, "Well, how are we going to do that? You know, we have young kids. We can't get away."

This is a time when you need to get away. You need to find a sitter. You need to find a family member to take your kids for the time being.

If you set it up for a Monday at 6 PM and that's the only day that your mom or your dad or your sister or the sitter can be over, then that's when it's going to have to happen. You're going to have to disrupt your schedule a little bit, and it may not be the perfect time, but I'll tell you, you're better off doing it than waiting for it to be perfect. So think about that when you are setting up your State of Our Marriage conversation.

Alisa: I want to tell you there's never going to be a perfect time. Don't wait for the perfect time, like Tony said, because some of you on this call have been waiting for the perfect time to have the conversation and that's why you're joining us today.

So by choosing one topic and a specific day and time, you're taking the element of surprise out of the conversation, because at the end of the day, no one likes surprises.

Open Up and
Be Vulnerable

Alisa: Open Up and Be Vulnerable.

You can see my little smiley face guy there. Everyone wears masks. That's his mask. You know, thumbs up, I'm having a happy day. You wear masks...at work, around your friends, with your family, and yes, even with your spouse.

Some of the masks that you wear are perfectionist, hard worker, have it all together, organized, not easily bothered, slow to anger, I never lie, I'd never hurt you.

Every single one of you on this call has worn a mask at some point in time in your life. Some of you know your masks and know which ones you wear around friends, family, and even your spouse.

I'd love it if you would be brave enough to share anonymously what masks you wear in your marriage?

You can just type it in to that little box there on the left. We're not going to say the names. We just want to know what masks that you're carrying with you into this class tonight.

I'm working with a couple who when I asked them this question, they resisted even doing this exercise. When I asked them what masks do you wearing, they said, "We don't wear any masks."

I said, "Okay, well, the first mask you're wearing is that you don't wear masks."

And when they sat down and they did this exercise, they realized that the two of them were probably wearing five or six different masks depending on whether they were at work or with family or with friends or ultimately even with each other.

And what was enlightening to them was the fact that when they looked at the masks that they were wearing and realized that because they were wearing all these masks, they were exhausted all the time.

It finally shed light on the fact that part of the reason they haven't had time to invest in their marriage is because they're so busy trying to keep all of these masks on their face.

So the question is why do you wear your masks? And we've got the fun little boggle letters here spelling out the word FEAR.

This is why people wear masks, because you're afraid you won't be loved for who you are. Some of you have secrets that you've never told your spouse, or you've lied to your spouse and don't know how to tell the truth. For some of you, it just feels easier to be behind these masks.

But here's the thing, this fear of all these different things, this is robbing you of true connection with your spouse. It's robbing you of the ability to be loved for who you are, and we actually had

somebody write in that nothing ever bothers me. I would challenge that person to think about that as a mask.

Lots of people wear that armor, that I've got it all together and nothing ever bothers me. In some circumstances, that works and yet if nothing ever bothers you, or you say that nothing ever bothers you with your spouse you're not telling the truth.

There have been lots of times where I pretended that everything was fine, that nothing's bothering me, I'm good. But let me tell you something. Tony's got his quirks, and I've got mine. You can't live with somebody for any type of extended time and be truthful when you're saying "Nothing ever bothers me."

I spoke to a husband last week whose marriage was in trouble, and we were talking about masks. I said, "Well, let me ask you a question. Does your wife even know that you're on this call with me right now? You know, you're working on trying to save your marriage. You're working on putting all these pieces together and finding solutions."

And he said, "No. I'm afraid of what she would think or say."

And I remember – I wasn't even keeping this to myself, I blurted out, "Hey, buddy, you're calling for marriage help. Why on earth would you keep that from your wife? You have to stop living and reacting from this place of fear because it's crippling your marriage."

So we're getting a few more responses to the question of what masks are you wearing, and somebody said everything. I've worn that one. Again, perfectionist, mask of everything is okay.

Folks, you're not alone. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

The question becomes, though, what are you going to do about it and how are you going to overcome your fear. Tony actually wrote a very good article titled, [Three Ways to Overcome Your Fear](#). You can find that at ONE Extraordinary Marriage – go ahead.

You don't want to be trapped in fear. It's not healthy for you. It's not healthy for your marriage.

How many times have you looked at your husband or wife thinking they look just like this, like there's a giant question mark on their face?

But when you wear these masks, you waste a lot of energy trying to be someone you're not or having to remember to act a certain way.

Those of you that said that your mask is being the perfectionist or everything is okay, are there ever days where you just want to say, "I'm having a bad day," or "I don't have it all together"? You know, days when both of you that wear that I'm always a hard worker just want to take a day off, but you can't because you wear that mask and everybody expects it of you.

Wearing masks puts you in a position to doubt your spouse's affection and love. Do they love who you really are, or only who you appear to be? We've had people ask us the question "What

would my spouse say if they knew that I didn't like something or I didn't want to do something or I wanted to try something different? What if I told them that and I was being truthful but they didn't like it?"

I promise you your spouse would much rather know the truth than have you going along on some completely other tangent trying to be a perfect image that you're not. It also keeps your marriage from going deeper because your interactions are only on the surface level.

I've had spouses say to me in emails "I wish my spouse knew that I was struggling with work or having trouble keeping the house organized or even doubting my decision to be the stay-at-home parent."

When you have those questions or those statements running through your head all day long, you are using so much mental energy being wrapped up in wondering all the what ifs and who am I and what am I doing. You don't have any energy to actually put into your marriage. You have to make the choice that you want to spend your time and energy in a better place.

Tony: And folks, this is one of those State of Our Marriage conversations. If we go back to the beginning of this, setting up a time for a topic, taking off our masks, removing our masks, being real, honest, open with each other so we will be loved for who we are, this is a state of our marriage topic.

It takes time to be vulnerable and real with your spouse, and it's not something that's just going to happen at a blink of an eye, but it's going to take conversations, one at a time, this is a mask I'm wearing, this is a mask I wear, this is a mask I've worn. But it's when you take this area of our marriage and start digging down and working at it little by little. It could be just 15 minute conversations, but you'd be surprised. A 15 minute conversation once a week for 52 weeks, the change it can make in you and your spouse and the legacy you're going to leave.

Alisa: Here's the thing about the masks that you wear and the secrets that you keep. The truth will always come out. Always, always, always.

Many of you will remember a couple years ago, then CIA director General David Petraeus was scandalized when information of his affair was revealed. It hit all the major media outlets, and because of his position at the CIA, it was actually a worldwide scandal.

What I share with you is here's a gentleman as head of the CIA who really does have access to all of the best secret keeping devices, techniques, strategies known to man. And his secrets came out. His masks had to come off. So don't think that hiding the cell phone or not telling your spouse the complete truth is really hiding anything. I will tell you that as I worked with clients, secrets have come out in all kinds of very commonplace ways.

Somebody walks by a cell phone and a text message alert comes up and it says what the message is.

The secret is out.

Your spouse sits down at the computer and your email is up and there's an email conversation.

The secret is out.

Somebody calls your spouse and says whatever the secret is.

The secret is out.

It is so much better for your marriage if what you are keeping hidden, what you are hiding behind, the masks that you are wearing, if that is revealed to your spouse by you directly, than in any other way. When you make that conscious decision to be vulnerable to your spouse, you allow them to love you for who you are and the vulnerability that you are bringing to the relationship.

Tony: And this happened in our marriage. Early on in our marriage I worked for a company where I was traveling from here in California to the east coast, and while working, I would in the evenings after work was done, I would frequent the bars just to get something to eat, and I remember one particular time – it's still fresh in my mind, and this has to be, gosh, we're going back 14, 15 years now – that I was at a bar and specifically was there to try and pick up on women.

Wow. Yeah, you can say it. Tony, what a piece of junk, because really, that's what I was, and I held that secret in for many years, held it in from Alisa, and it just kept popping back up, and as we began to go through our State of Our Marriage conversations, starting to take off our masks, be real with each other so that we could connect, I finally had to open up, and I had to let this out.

Like Alisa said, the truth will always come out, and sometimes that truth is going to come from you. And yeah, it was a shocker. Yeah, it really took her aback. And yet it is one of the biggest things that we have – one of those things that we have overcome that has brought us closer together because I let it out there. It took time to work through it, and took us time to seek other counsel to help us, but that is what secrets will do. They will cripple you and your marriage.

Alisa: So no more. No more masks. No more secrets. As you look down this winding road, this beautiful picture, you see all of those twists and turns, sometimes where it's nice and straight and other places where curves in the road are fast and furious and you can't see a straight line. Choosing to open up and be vulnerable, to take off your masks and reveal your secrets to your spouse is a process, and there are going to be emotions and repercussions to deal with, just like all of those hairpin curves in this picture.

It's not going to be a straight line. You're not going to sit down one day, have a 15 minutes state State of Our Marriage conversation, say, "Babe, these are the masks I've been wearing, love me," and it's all going to be all better.

It's not like that.

It's curvy and it's messy and there are lots of twists. But the thing is, as you look at that picture, it comes closer to, as you see, that longer straight line, and you see the curves have straightened out a little bit here toward the forefront of the picture, and that's what happens when you practice opening up and being vulnerable.

At the very beginning of this, like Tony said, this is, by itself, a State of Our Marriage conversation, and part of what goes on with this is you need to share your fears and concerns that come with taking off your masks.

You need to share what you're afraid of. Maybe it's rejection. Maybe it's anger. Maybe it's your spouse's tears. You need to share that you have those fears. That's part of developing this vulnerability. And you have to decide that you are not going to hide anymore.

You're a grown up who is going to take charge of your life, and you're not going to hide behind these fears, because this is a mindset change. This is all starting with what you tell yourself, what plays on that tape in your head when things aren't going well and you're like oh, the negative, the negative.

I'm telling you right now I'm going to share with you how to change that into the positive.

Tony and I are big believers in affirmations, and this is one that I put together for any of you listening to this.

Tweak this so that it makes sense and it's personalized for you, but this is a basic format.

"I choose to be open and honest with my spouse. I take responsibility for my actions and my words. I have the ability to build my marriage, and I choose to do so with how I live my life."

Some of you reading this have probably just taken a deep breath at what each one of those words means. I want you to notice that it's written in the present tense. This is not something that I am wishing for in the future. It's not something far off in my five to ten year plan. This is today. This starts with right now. It starts with very specific words.

When you start filling your brain with positive words just like these, you start seeking out those actions that go along with the words. Your actions will follow the words that you put into your head, so if you choose to be open and honest, you're going to look for opportunities to do so. If you say, "I take responsibility for my actions and my words," that means you are no longer hiding. When you say, "I have the ability to build my marriage and choose to do so with how I live my life," you will actively seek out those opportunities that allow you to build your marriage and demonstrate that with your actions.

Use I Feel

Alisa: You.

How many of you have ever used any of these phrases? You can just type yes or no in the question box.

Have you ever said “You always” or “You never” or “I just wish you would”? Anyone? I know I’m guilty of it. I’ve used that, not just with Tony, but also with the kids, which is another workshop. I want to talk about using I feel, because these statements, “You always,” “You never,” or “I just wish you would,” we usually say them with kind of a tone in our voice that’s typically not loving. You may even go so far as to point a finger or get up in somebody’s face, and statements like these make it all about what your spouse is doing when really what you want to convey is the impact that their actions are having on you.

Why do you want to convey that instead of making it all about them? Because your spouse, they can argue all day long about what they’ve done, but your feelings are your own. They belong to you. No one can tell you what you feel. No one can tell you how to feel. That is yours.

I just want to share here, we’ve got a couple people that have said “Yes, we’ve used those statements,” “yes to all of those statements”.

Yeah, Tony and I have used them. They’re not very effective.

It’s time to stop building your walls. When you use words like always or never, you always, you never, you start building a messy wall just like this one you see here. It’s not nice and neat. It’s got broken pieces. The concrete’s messy and irregular. The same thing happens when we use these words with our spouses.

We start building walls that are messy and irregular with jagged edges and sharp corners, because when we use these words, when we make it all about our spouse and not about us and our feelings, our spouse’s immediately go on the defensive.

As soon as they hear always or never, they’re thinking about that one time that they didn’t do that, and guess what? They’re going to throw that in your face. Using these words, saying “You always,” “You never,” “I wish you would,” it halts the communication. It adds one brick at a time to that wall. It leads to expressions of your communication that are awkward, off-center.

These walls...these are not foundational walls. These are walls that break your relationship down and crumble because they’re not strong. Working on using I Feel and working on opening up and being vulnerable and choosing your battles and your time, you’re building the communication skills that you need to take down those bricks, to remove the barriers to your conversations.

Are you aware of how you’re feeling right now?

This is actually a fabulous chart to have on your refrigerator, in your bathroom, in the living room, because many of us only use a couple of words.

I'm happy.

I'm sad.

I'm frustrated.

I'm angry.

When really, there are a lot of different ways to describe how we're feeling in reaction to our spouse's action. See, as I said in the last slide, your feelings are your own, and you're the only one who knows how you feel. When you're able to say, "I feel suspicious," "I feel horrified," "I'm surprised," "I feel anxious because of," and then fill in the blank with the action, you're personalizing that situation, you're being very specific about how you feel, and you no longer have to hide behind these vague words.

I believe we've actually gotten to a point as a society where words like happy and frustrated and angry, we don't even know what they mean because they're bantered about so frequently, but if I look at Tony and say, "I'm really disappointed," there's a whole different emotion that comes from hearing that word that, "Well, I'm angry."

Tony: One of the things when we look at I Feel, and especially when you're looking at these charts and trying to decipher your own emotions, all too often, we're so sucked into electronics or other things that we never really get the time to just sit down and know where we're at. That's a big thing. That's something that you've got to think about.

If you're running around all the time and you're go, go, go, go, go mode, it's going to be really hard for you to decipher if you are upset, are you shocked, are you bored, are you enraged right now, and why.

There are going to be times where you have to slow down, call a time out. I've got to figure out where I'm at. I've got to understand why I'm surprised by that, why I'm bored from you just talking to me and you're droning on and I just can't focus on you. I get it. I've been there.

I've called time out on Alisa before because she's just going on and I can't focus, I'm just zoning out. So sometimes we've got to just step back and find a place to focus inward. For some of you, it may be practicing yoga. For others it may be when you're working out, walking, running, or cycling. For others of you, you may be listening to some really good classical music that takes you to a point where you're able to just be introspective.

For others, it may be in the morning when you have your cup of coffee or your tea and you're reading the Bible. Those may be those times when you're really able to go "You know what, right now I'm just sad," and own it.

Too often, we're told to put on those masks of everything is okay that we don't own it when we're sad, and I've learned one thing over the last four plus years of doing the [ONE Extraordinary Marriage Show](#). It's okay to cry. It's okay to let people know when you're angry. It's okay to let people know when you're hurt. You know what? We're human. We're real, and when we get to know who we are and we get to use those I feel words, we get to feel ourselves too, and that's pretty amazing.

Alisa: One thing here too with being aware of how you're feeling and what's going on with you, your spouse does not have ESP. They cannot read your mind. They cannot read your feelings. On those off chances when they're in sync with what you want, that's a fluke. That is not ESP.

You have to make it a practice to tell your spouse what you're feeling, and there's a very simple formula, and it goes like this.

I feel [X], and you can choose one of these faces on here, when you [Y]. The [X] is your feeling, [Y] is your spouse's action. So you could say, "I feel embarrassed when you talk about my weight around friends."

That's your feeling and a very specific action that happens in a specific time. "I feel exhausted when you continuously ask me questions about what I'm doing when I'm making dinner."

That was an actual conversation that one of my coaching clients had while we were on the phone during a call. It happened just a couple weeks ago, too. A couple I was working with, they kept going back and forth about their household chores, who was doing what and how the house was being kept and circular, circular, circular, so I finally just said, "tell me what you're feeling."

He had this chart, and he was able to say, "I feel overwhelmed by all of the clutter around our house. I don't feel comfortable walking into the house, and it makes me feel anxious and overwhelmed." He was able to be very specific about his feelings and how that related to the experience of all these things in the house that his wife actually understood.

Okay, he's not just harping on me to clean up my mess. This is actually creating a feeling in him that is uncomfortable and that's why he's reacting. It was a very powerful session for the two of them.

Palms Up

Alisa: Palms Up.

Body language has an incredible impact on your communication. You've probably heard the statistics. Nonverbal communication makes up roughly 80 to 90 percent of your communication, the remainder being the spoken word.

You and I both know that when you're having a conversation with your spouse, you're watching what they're doing to gauge how they're interacting with you. Are their arms crossed? Are they rolling their eyes? Are they looking at someone or something else in that distracted state?

Some of you may not even be aware of what your body language is saying because the behaviors are automatic. You've been doing them for so long that you don't even realize it's almost a reflex instead of a body language that you're aware of.

I have one couple that I work with that he actually has this little facial smirk that he gets when they're in an intense conversation, and so what we've worked out with them is that he actually tells his wife when he feels that this is going to start to surface. They've learned to incorporate his body language into their conversations, and when you become aware of your body language, when you become aware of what that nonverbal communication is saying to your spouse, that's a choice you make to change the entire tone of the conversation.

It's a conscious decision. See that circle there that says your comfort zone? That's all the body language that we're used to.

That's crossing our arms. That's rolling our eyes. That's that loud sigh when our spouse is talking to us.

The other circle is where the magic happens. That's making a conscious decision to alter your body language. That's choosing to actively participate in this conversation, to get on that same path by changing how you physically present yourself to your spouse.

There is a book out there; it's called Love Does by Bob Goff. I've heard him speak a couple of times. He's an attorney by profession, a visionary by passion, and he shared in his presentation this strategy he used to use with his legal clients when they were sitting for a deposition, which can be a very stressful time.

He would always tell his legal clients, "Sit with your palms up, whether it be on the lap or on the table while they're asking you these questions." He shared that this was always kind of an awkward thing, and I'm telling you it will be awkward for you too. I'm going to encourage each one of you, when you have a State of Our Marriage conversation or when you have a conversation where you can feel your body temperature starting to get ramped up, sit palms up.

It's going to be awkward, and it's going to be unnatural. I'm telling you, though; it is going to change the conversation. You sit there, getting out of your comfort zone, getting out of your routine behaviors, and you put yourself into a place where the two of you can really connect.

For those of you that are not driving in a car right now, I want you to open up your palms and put them either on the table in front of you or on your lap and you'll see that by choosing to do this, it opens up your personal space. It invites the conversation, and it lowers your emotional temperature by releasing the stress in your body.

Tony: Just last week, my beautiful daughter Abby and I were going head to head. We have very similar personalities, and the tension was rising. We had some verbal communication, some lack thereof, happening, and we were sitting down for dinner – and this started before dinner and we began to sit down for dinner, and it was still going on. Alisa just looked at both of us and said, "Listen. Palms up. Palms up right now."

Abby and I looked at each other. We both put our palms up. We had a smile on our faces, and we were able at that moment enough to break that bickering that was happening, and sitting there palms up allowed us to open up, change our body language, which allowed her and I to then engage in what the issue was, go to the I feel, you, I feel this, and that allowed us to diffuse the situation.

Yes, I'm using an example with my daughter because what we talk about here can work in many different areas of your family, with your kids, spouses, the main one, obviously, that we're discussing today.

Alisa: Okay, so for those of you that are still sitting palms up, you can stop. I want to make sure that you aren't sitting there for the rest of the time, unless it's comfortable, in which case, go for it.

What happens when you go palms up?

Your focus becomes re-centered on your spouse, and just like Tony said, if you don't start the conversation palms up, agree beforehand that either one of you can call for it during the conversation. It's as simple as saying, "Palms up."

I want to share with you what happens when you hear that phrase, and again, remember you've agreed to go palms up before the conversation even starts. But when you hear palms up, the first thing that might happen is that you might start to laugh, because it's such a silly thing to throw into a conversation.

You're having this serious conversation about finances or sex and the next things you know, palms up, palms out. Laughing breaks that tension, that's good for your conversation. Another thing that might happen is that you might take a breath. You might actually pause and just breathe, because let's face it, when we start to get all animated we stop breathing. Our breath gets very shallow, and that's what also causes our body to constrict.

So you're going to pause and you're going to take a breath. This is going to allow you to regroup your thoughts and regain your composure.

Tony and I first mentioned palms up probably about a year ago in a podcast. We had somebody that had found and they went back and started listening to some old shows. They heard about palms up, and this was a couple that was having some difficulties in their marriage. The wife, after listening to a particular podcast, had decided to try palms up during a conversation.

She shared in an email with us that when they called for palms up during a conversation, the “All of a sudden, we’re looking at each other, sitting there with our palms up, and we just started laughing, and that was enough to calm us down so that we could go on and have the serious conversation without it turning into a screaming match.”

I know a lot of you on this call know what I’m talking about when I say that their conversations would escalate into a screaming match. Were they still frustrated by the events that brought them to that conversation...Absolutely.

But seeing one another changed their body language made both of them realize that they were each trying to make the marriage a priority, that they were each trying to make the other one a priority, and so they hung in there and they were able to make it through that tough talk and the ones that followed.

**Listen to Understand,
Not to Interrupt**

Alisa: Listen to Understand, Not to Interrupt.

“So he or she who has ears, let him or her hear. When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know, but if you listen, you may learn something new.” –Unknown

When I first saw this quote, this made me stop, because I think about how with my kids, how with Tony there are lots of times where I’m just not listening, it’s all about me. Talking, talking, talking, talking, but if I stop and listen, just like we’re sharing with you to stop and listen, you’re going to learn a lot about your spouse.

How many of you have played out this conversation or this scenario at some point in time in your marriage?

“No I didn’t.”

“Yes you did.”

“No I didn’t.”

“Yes you did.”

I’m guessing there are a few smirks going on around the world right now as I say that, because you’ve been there. You’ve done it. You are so quick, just like I am sometimes – this is my big letter in the COUPLE Communication Method.

When two people are communicating, they each bring their own perceptions and agendas to the conversation. You know you do. If your husband says, “We’re talking about finances,” you’re already thinking about “Ooh, how much did I spend at the grocery store? How much did I spend at the mall? The kids need braces. The kids need sports equipment,” and he’s coming and he wants to talk about, “Okay, how are we going to plan for our vacation next year?”

Two separate agendas coming to the same conversation, and these mental distractions, they keep you from being fully present, because you’re thinking about your own agenda, not about what you’re actually hearing.

When this happens, the conversation becomes about you, not about what the other person is saying. It’s about what your words are that you have to use.

Over the next couple of slides, I’m going to share with you three words that can change the entire conversation, taking it from out of control to under control. But before we get to those three words, I really want to talk about what interrupting does to your marriage and what it does to your spouse.

When you interrupt your spouse, it shows a lack of respect for their ideas. That line right there that goes across the middle of your slide that says, “This is not important,” that’s the message that you give your spouse when you interrupt them.

It tells your spouse that you are more important than they are. Your ideas and what you have to say matter so much more than what they have to say. It matters so much that you're willing to talk over them instead of waiting for them to finish.

It also causes more frustration when they can't complete their thoughts. I'm guessing that some of you have heard your spouse say, "Please just let me finish my sentence." And going back to that whole thing about your spouse doesn't have ESP or you don't have ESP, it makes you look foolish when your ESP isn't working, because you're jumping ahead. Thinking about what they're going to say or how they're going to present themselves, and that wasn't where your spouse was going, but you've completely upended the conversation by interrupting them with what you think they're going to say.

I want to share with you those three little words that can help you avoid feeling like this.

I heard you.

These three powerful words can completely change the feeling in the conversation. "I heard you" means that you have made a choice to listen to your spouse and not jump ahead with your own thoughts. What you do is you take the "I heard you" and then you're going to finish that sentence with what you actually heard them say.

If your spouse is talking about you know what, I'm really stressed at work, and I'm having trouble with my boss, and we're having problems with this project, when they stop, you can say, "I heard you say that you're frustrated with how things are going with your boss." This is that mirror speak that many of you have heard in other communication programs.

I heard you matters.

It means that you're working to understand your spouse better by telling them how you heard what they said, and here's what it does for your spouse. It gives them an opportunity to clarify if there's a discrepancy between what they said and what you heard.

There have been times when I told Tony, "Oh, I heard you, this and this is going on." He's responded back, "Not even close." And that's because my own filter was still working, but when I gave him the opportunity to clarify and I zipped my own lip, he was able to re-explain what is going on with him.

When you wait for your spouse to finish that thought, you give them that respect that they are so desperately wanting. You lower their emotional energy because they're not fighting against your interruptions. You're not getting bogged down in miscommunications.

The ESP that's not working for you... You can avoid that by waiting until they finish their thought, and ultimately, when you listen to understand and not to interrupt them, you're conveying that your spouse, and by default, what they have to say is important.

Tony: One way to do this is when a thought comes to your mind count to ten. By the time you finish, they may be finishing up, and you can then go, "I heard you say." Another way to do this is have a pen and paper handy and write down what you're thinking.

Again, these are tools that you guys can use, and you're going to learn. Some of them are going to work great. Some of these you are going to use and implement today, tomorrow, and they're going to just work perfectly. Others are going to take some tweaking as you both begin to understand. Your spouse may be going, "Well, why are you writing something down? You're not listening," and you're going to have to explain, "Hey, honey, I don't want to interrupt you, so I'm just putting it down, so that way I am still listening, I'm just putting it down on paper because I don't want to forget."

These are tips that you can use to be able to listen to your spouse. It takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of work to be able to, like Alisa said, "zip your lip and just listen." This is something that Alisa and I have been working on for almost five years now, to be able to listen, to understand what each of us are saying, and not to interrupt each other, and it allows us to get through conversations much quicker because we're just boom, boom, boom, boom, finished a conversation.

Again, it's taken us time. It's taken us time to realize the benefits and remember each of you are on a journey. Each of you are on a journey, no matter if you're engaged, newlyweds, or been married 20, 30, 40 years. You're on a journey, and this is part of it, and there's going to be some retraining and some relearning that's going to have to happen.

Alisa: One of the things to recognize is that anything that matters to you in your life, you're going to have to invest in. You're going to have to invest your time, and you're going to have to invest your resources, and when you're developing your communication skills, your resources mean your mental energy. It means your self-control. It means your time. And all of these things come together, but I will promise you that when you make the investment to strengthen your communication skills, that investment will pay dividends that you cannot even imagine.

Extend Grace

Alisa: Extend Grace.

The first thing I want each one of you to think about is that if you live in the past, your marriage stays in the past. I love this little picture here because it says you can't start the next chapter of your life if you keep re-reading the last one.

So often when couples are trying to communicate, they're trying to learn new communication skills, it becomes this rehash of the past. It is tough to re-write, to start the next chapter, the chapter where the two of you work on your communication, if all you keep telling one another is, "Well, you never listen to me." Again, "you never", isn't effective. We already talked about that. Or, "I don't think you'll sit down and talk with me." Well, let's try. Let's not focus on what's happened in the past and start writing that next chapter of the future.

See that rock there, grace, all nice and smooth, in and amongst all those other rocks, some of which have jagged edges and different colors and they're not all perfect? That's kind of like each one of us.

Grace is a gift that no one deserves but everyone should receive. See, in marriage, every single one of us has made a mistake, and some are bigger than others. I'm the first person to admit it. They're ways of impacting our marriage and closing down the communication, and what's going to really define your marriage is how the two of you choose to handle those situations and how the two of you choose to communicate through those methods.

I often tell people when they ask me what I think of marriage, and I say, "Well, in my opinion, marriage is the union of two imperfect people attempting to live and grow old together, and it's not always super smooth, it's not always smooth sailing, it's not always that straight road, but it is a road that is worthwhile. It is a road that needs to be full of grace for those mistakes when they are made."

I want to share with you a verse out of Ephesians. It's Ephesians 2:8, and it says, "For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God." And it is that gift of understanding and of realizing I'm not perfect and neither are you.

We are those two imperfect people attempting to live and grow old together. Grace is a gift that's available to both of you. Grace, and by extension, forgiveness are two of the most dynamic communication tools that a couple has available to them. Choosing to forgive what has happened in the past means that you can work towards changing your future.

It's extending the opportunity to rebuild in spite of past pains and disappointments. We all have them. Tony shared with you what it was like when he told me about his experiences when he would work on the east coast. I will tell you that in that immediate moment of him sharing what he had attempted to do, I literally felt like the wind had been knocked out of me. It was a sucker punch to my gut. I couldn't breathe.

I found out about that six years ago, roughly, and my marriage is better than ever because of the fact that I am not re-reading that chapter. From that point, we started a new chapter, and we talked through what brought us to that point, and we also – and this is another part of extending grace – it's remembering what brought the two of you together in the first place and seeking to create the relationship that the two of you want.

Over the last four years and 200 plus podcasts, we've heard from thousands of couples whose marriages have been turned upside down for a variety of reasons. The ones that are still together, those are the ones who realized that they needed to extend grace to one another and that they needed to rebuild their marriage on a stronger foundation with communication tools just like these that we have outlined in the COUPLE Communication Method.

So here are your action items. Because you know – if this is your first time listening to Tony and I, we believe that you shouldn't ever leave us without having some very specific action steps. If you've been listening for a while, this slide does not surprise you at all.

You need to choose the topic for your next conversation, that State of Our Marriage conversation that the two of you are going to have.

You need to choose a date and time to talk.

You've got to be intentional. If it goes on the calendar, it happens.

You need to share the masks that you have been wearing and open up.

You need to speak with a focus on your feelings, not your spouse's actions, using I feel.

You need to make the choice to change your body language. Remember, palms up. It invites the conversation and it lowers your body temperature.

You need to listen without interruption. I heard what you are trying to tell me.

And finally, you need to move into the present and out of the past by extending grace to your spouse.

Tony: And so this is a long action items list, so some of you are listening and you're looking at this slide and going "Whoa, where do we start?" And I would suggest that you start from the top of this, listen again, listen and determine where are you going to start.

Is it going to be at a State of Our Marriage conversation? Is that the big one? We have a monster topic that needs to be addressed. And for some of you, this is where you are right now. You've got a monster topic that needs to be addressed, and from there, you've got to calendar it.

For others of you, you've been living, you've been moving along, you've been married; you've put on those masks over the years of marriage, and so maybe for you it's just an acknowledgement of each other to each other to go, "You know what? We're going to start opening up. We're going to start taking these masks off. Little by little, we're going to take one off at a time." It doesn't

need to be all at once. We're going to start opening up little by little, and we're going to work through this together.

Some of you, maybe thinking, I need to look at myself and realize how I'm feeling during certain conversations and to speak up and say, "I feel this way."

Others of you, you need to just implement the palms up. You need to change your body language when your spouse speaks to you. You need to stop crossing your arms. You need to stop rolling your eyes. You need to stop slumping over and sighing. Your body language speaks volumes.

Others of you need to just say I heard. You're always just telling your spouse, you're just repeating back to them what they're saying, but you're not hearing them. You need to say, "I heard you say this. I heard you say that you're not enjoying when we go out on date night because I'm sitting on my phone," and you've got to acknowledge that. You need to know that, I hear you.

And lastly, some of you are living in the past, and you've just got to extend grace. You've got to forgive your spouse for the knucklehead things that have happened. You know, we're human. None of us are perfect. Alisa and I sit here sharing with you our imperfections, but one thing that we have been able to do time and time again, even to this day when we make those mistakes, is look at each other, say we're sorry, and say, "I forgive you for what happened" and extend grace.

Question and Answers

Tony: That concludes the couple communication method, and that was the meat of the workshop, so we hope that what we shared here today you'll be able to use in your marriage, and again, I would suggest going back and listening to those sections where you can really dig down a little bit more and apply it in your marriage. That's the key, folks. We need to apply, not just to listen, but to apply.

This brings us to the Q& A section, and the way we're going to do this is we're going to start with the questions that were submitted ahead of time. We have a number of those, and we'll start reading those off and answering those. If you're on the webcast now, you can type in your question. I've seen a couple come through. Don't hesitate. Put them on in there.

So let's start from the questions that were submitted.

Alisa: Okay, the first question is, "My wife and I have been married for 8 years and have three young children at home. We love our life, but struggle to get quality communication in on a regular basis. My wife cares for our children at home during the day, and when I return home from work in the early evening, she is so ready to connect with me in conversation. Inevitably, the children also vie for my attention, and the general hubbub of the dinner and evening routines make for difficult quality connecting. Do you have any suggestions for how we could approach getting that quality conversation in rather than let the sometimes hectic family life steal it away?"

Tony: Yeah, this is a great question, and I can totally relate to this. So, this is a thing that I think needs to happen and should happen. You guys need to have a conversation. Go, "Look, the kids are chomping at the bit, and they're there, I'm not going to be able to talk to you and you're not going to be able to talk to me until I'm in, hanging out with them."

My suggestion is that you get the pleasantries in. Yes, sometimes it's just the quick kiss, the quick "I love you, glad you're home." Pay attention to the kiddos, but know that you're going to get them to bed and then that you're going to spend some time together afterwards.

For Alisa and I, this is how we typically run our household. I'll come in, pleasantries, you know, activities, kids are running here, there, we're in, we're out, we're doing this, we're doing that. What we do, though, is once dinner is done, it's bedtime, and for us, we make sure our kids' doors are closed, we let them know that, and then we get our time in the evening to share what's happened, what's vital. I would also say if you can connect during the day somehow, even if it's just a couple of text messages to each other, whatever you can do to stay connected, even in small little bits, is vital.

Alisa: One other strategy that I didn't learn about until our children were older is that I've heard from other moms and dads where they set up the time, there's like a fifteen minute window when daddy comes home from work, and the kids can be playing, they can do that kind of stuff, but that's 15 minutes for mom and dad to reconnect, for her, like you said, she's ready to have adult conversation after taking care of three young kids. Maybe there's a special thing the kids do every day during that 15 minutes so that the two of you can do that ahead of time.

I wish that I had known that when our kids were young. We would have definitely instituted it, but like Tony said, for us, we worked it out so that I know I'm not being ignored when he walks in the door. It's just the kids need to see daddy.

Okay, next question is, "Our question is how do you balance the need of one partner who would like sex more often than the other? In this case, the greater need of the husband."

Tony: Alright. So the big thing here is that I think you're starting at the top. It's the State of Our Marriage conversation, and we are going to discuss our intimacy lifestyle. Discuss the Intimacy Lifestyle, and I'm going to just describe that right now for you guys because this is vital to this question.

The Intimacy Lifestyle is that each of you are going to determine how many times you're going to have sex in a week together. You're going to determine this, and for example, for Alisa and I, we determined through a of Our Marriage conversation that both of us were willing to have sex two times a week. And we split the week up. So Sundays, Mondays, and Tuesdays, those are Alisa's days to choose and initiate sex. On Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday, I choose a day when I'm going to initiate sex, but it all started with a of Our Marriage conversation.

We have worked with couples who came to an agreement that it was going to be one time a week. Others have agreed to three, four times a week. That is why the State of Our Marriage conversation is important. It is where you guys are opening up, discussing it, working it out, possibly even putting it on the calendar so you know as you're working through that.

Alisa: So the next question says, "My husband and I communicate a lot on the telephone as his work has him away 90 percent of the time. I'd love to get tips on fighting, discussing, and connecting over the phone and long distance communication tips."

Tony and I were long distance for the first year, roughly, of our dating relationship, and we probably made every communication mistake via the phone known to man. One of the things that I have to say at the very beginning of this as far as tips, please do not fight via text. You actually have to hear the person's voice. You have to talk through the fights. So many of the miscommunications that happen in relationships happen because you're thumb texting with all caps because you're really mad and you're just flinging these zingers back and forth to one another. You're not even taking into account the fact that the other person may be in a meeting, they may be driving when they're reading the text.

I don't say that very often, I don't make those declarations, like this is a bad behavior. Text fighting is a bad behavior. The other part of that is just like we said for the face to face conversations with the State of Our Marriage conversation; you need to set up times to have the bigger conversation. If there's something going on and he's not going to be home for a week, two weeks, whatever it is, then you need to schedule, hey, babe, we need to talk about this. What does your work schedule look like this week? What does your availability look like so that you and I can both be on the phone at the same time to talk?

Tony: What I would suggest is use technology. We have FaceTime, we have Skype, we have ways that we can see each other, because like we said, that body language is a key component to being able to communicate effectively as a couple. So setting up State of Our Marriage conversation, and you're calendaring it, and you're talking over these mediums.

The next thing is making sure that these conversations are ones that you can see each other. You're still going to use the COUPLE Communication Method. You're still going to use the same process as if you were together in the same room. I know it's a little bit more difficult to get the feeling of what's happening, because I know for myself there are times when the touch, the arm around the shoulder, the kiss, can diffuse some things. Through a screen, it's going to be harder, and yet being able to see your spouse instead of just on the phone I think makes a big difference, but again, it all starts out with that State of Our Marriage conversation.

Alisa: The other part of that too is fighting over technology and establishing your fighting rules ahead of time. You guys should actually probably have a State of Our Marriage conversation on how you're going to handle disagreements so that you both know, if somebody says, "I need a time out, can I call you back in an hour", it's not an avoidance, it's a "I've got to calm down and process this."

Given the fact that you're so far away from each other, and not in the same room, I would just say, "I need to go for a walk". Here, you may actually have to table that conversation, and this is something the two of you have to talk through. You know your fighting styles. You know what your tendencies are, and if one of you needs space, it's given with the understanding that the conversation isn't ignored; it's just tabled until that time.

Here is a question from a wife. She says, "My husband works long days and gets home right before dinner. Once dinner is eaten, dishes are put away, kids showered and tucked into bed, it can be later in the evening before we get to talk. We've had many good conversations climbing into bed at night, but our question is how to guard when emotions or tiredness get the better of you and a simple discussion turns horribly wrong very fast. Our bedroom is a comfortable and safe place where we feel open to converse and discuss any conversational topic, but we've fallen into the trap many a time where a deep conversational topic has come up and one of us is too tired to actively respond and search for answers, which, of course, makes the other spouse mad and left feeling hurt. How do we guard against this?"

The first thing that I would say is at the very onset, when you start to feel like the conversation is taking that right turn into something more serious, something more deep, something that has the potential to be one of these conversations that you've described, you need to stop and ask the question of each other, do I have the energy reserves to have this conversation right now?

What happens is once you get past that turn and you start on that slippery slope down into the conversation, it's very hard to pull back at that point in time, but if you ask the question and the answer is honestly no, I'm exhausted, I don't have the energy to talk about this, can we start it tomorrow, can we set up a time to talk about it, then what that conveys to your spouse is look, this is still important to me, I'm not telling you I'm not going to talk about this, I just want to be in

the position – and this is what we talked about when we were talking about Choose Your Battles, Choose Your Time – you want to give your spouse the best of you. You want to be the best version of yourself in a conversation that is deep and is fraught with emotions. If it's late and you're tired and cranky, you're not doing that. You give your spouse the gift of yourself when you say, "I don't have the energy reserved tonight. I want to talk about this. Let's set up a time."

Tony: It's I Feel. I feel exhausted right now, and nothing good is going to come out of this conversation. Could we please table this? Let's write it down, and let's table this until we are both awake and able to discuss this at a time when we both have the energy.

We've been there and all of a sudden you're spinning out of control and you're tired and you're starting to cry and it's just like oh my gosh, we're just so tired and we're going nowhere. So I would just say stop it before you even get there. I get it, it's a big conversation, but if you're exhausted, you're tired; you've had a long day, table it. Table it. You're doing yourself so much good and for your marriage than trying to get the answers right then and there.

Alisa: This is all about setting up those guardrails for your marriage, and setting them up before you find yourself in that situation, establishing your guardrails and establishing how you're going to navigate these conversations beforehand.

Tony: Alright, here we go with another one. "My spouse has not asked for forgiveness. How can I forgive him if there is no acknowledgement? How can I communicate this?"

Alisa: Forgiveness has absolutely nothing to do with your spouse and everything to do with you. Forgiveness is a choice that we make as to how we are going to respond and or react to how we've been hurt in the past. There have been lots of people who have hurt me over the years. Tony and I have had our situations, other people, and things that hurt us. Those people have never asked for forgiveness. Sometimes they don't even know they had hurt me, and yet it's my choice on how I handle that. Do I hold the grudge? Do I hold this over their head? Do I treat them differently, or do I choose to forgive? Forgiveness is all about the forgiver.

Tony: Here's a question we have. "How do you counter a bad habit of both spouses deferring heavily to the other, meaning we both always go along with the other's idea and suggestions regardless of feelings, and we seem to have a problem breaking away and doing our own thing?"

Alisa: What do you want to do?

I don't know, honey, what do you want to do?

I don't know.

Whatever you want to do is fine with me.

Tony and I actually use that as a skit when we speak in front of live audiences. The reason that we do that is because it resonates with just about everybody we come in contact with. We don't

want to hurt anybody's feelings. We don't want to make anybody feel bad, so we're just going to go along for the ride.

Really what you're doing is you're hurting your marriage because you're not being open and vulnerable. Sometimes you are going to do things that you don't want to do, and you'll be surprised to find out that you'll enjoy them.

If this is the habit that the two of you have gotten in, then you need to sit down and have that State of Our Marriage conversation and say, and based on how that question was worded, it's obvious to me that both the husband and the wife are aware that they engage in this behavior. What I want to say is you're both aware of it, so let's sit down and have that conversation where you're going to take off those masks and you're going to say, "You know what? For 24 hours, for one weekend, we are going to practice. If one of us asks a question, we're just going to say honestly I don't want to do that or I do want to do that."

You have to get in the habit of actually being honest and authentic with your spouse. It's not going to come naturally because you've spent so much time not doing it. You start with those baby steps. You start with we're going on a date night, honey, do you want to go to a burger place or do you want to go to an Italian place? Instead of the default of saying "I don't know, what do you want to do?" you say "Remember, we're practicing being authentic," and hopefully she'll say either burger place or Italian place, or "Really, I don't want either one of those, I want Chinese."

This is another skill that the two of you have to develop in your communication toolbox. It's the choice that on those interactions, you're not going to just defer out of habit, but you're going to state your mind because honestly, your spouse wants to know what you think. They just don't want you deferring to them all the time.

Tony: Another thing I would suggest is in our first book [Stripped Down: 13 Keys to Unlocking Intimacy in Your Marriage](#), one of the keys is Take the Lead. This is something that I think every couple should do, from date night to, just determining what you're going to go – if you're going to watch a movie.

Sometimes you've just got to Take the Lead, and this can go back and forth. Alisa and I tend to do this, and it's like hey, it's my month to Take the Lead for date night. We're going to a Mexican restaurant, and it's going to be in Del Mar, California, that's a coastal town here about thirty minutes away from where we live. We're going to go up there. It's a great place. We're going to have a good time. We're going to walk around afterwards. Boom. Done.

There is no hemming and hawing about what do you think or yeah we'll just go with it because that's what you want to do. It's really interesting because couples who take us up on that, it empowers them. It empowers the marriage, because now one person in the couple is able to just go "This is what we're going to do," and the next month, the other spouse gets to Take the Lead.

We've done this for a long time when it comes to date night, and we experienced so many different new things because of it. My likes are different than Alisa's, and we've learned that, and we've learned to accept that. We've grown older together. When we first got married, we were 23 and 22. We changed. We've changed, and learning each other's new likes and dislikes is part of the process, but by taking the lead, you're able to go "We're breaking out of this. We're going to break out of this, and we're going to just go do something, and I'm going along for the ride."

I love it when Alisa goes, "Hey, we're doing this and this. Let's go. Let's check it out. Let's have fun."

Alisa: It's always nice to get a break from the decision making, and that's what taking the lead allows you just to mentally get a break from that.

This next question says, "When I open up and tell my spouse something, I am often given a solution, and he gets upset if I don't take the advice. What is the best way to respond to this?"

I hear this same question from a lot of women, and part of that has to do with the fact that there are quite a few men out there who are wired as problem solvers. I'm going out there, and I'm finding a solution, and that's the way they're wired, and we've had this situation in our very own marriage.

What I had to learn to do was to tell Tony, if we were having a conversation where I was presenting a problem to him, that A, I need his help solving the problem, or if B, I just need him to listen to me. Sometimes I talk myself into the solution just by having him nod his head and say, "Uh huh. Okay." And sometimes I need the way his brain works to help me come up with a solution.

If he knows ahead of time, he's not giving me advice on those days I just need him to listen to me. He gives me advice when I have asked for it. The other part of that, too, is to let your husband know ahead of time, or your wife depending on what the roles are in your marriage, that yes, it is okay for them to give you advice. Depending on how you work through this in your own head, you may not take the advice.

You're appreciative of their input. You're still going to work things out on your own. I find that letting people know what the expectations are, what you're going to do ahead of time, this is especially effective with spouse's and children, if you let them know yes, I need your help, yes, this is what I'm going to do. This diffuses a lot of that tension because they already know if you looking for help, or are you just looking for an ear to listen?

Tony: Alright our next question. This is a little long one, so bear with me here. "I have a hard time getting a straight answer from my husband when I ask him what he would like to do when we have free time to hang out. When I make a suggestion, he often answers, "Okay, if you want to," or "Is that what you want to do?" He rarely says yes or no directly to my question. I try to explain that I'd like to know if he's interested in the activity I suggested. He says he doesn't want to answer directly because he thinks that I will give in and not do the activity, like listening to a

marriage podcast, for example, if he says he's not interested, but I can't make that judgment call if he doesn't let me know where he stands on something."

This goes back to taking the lead. Take that lead. Go for it. Just go "We're doing this." That's it. We are going to play miniature golf on our weekend just to go have fun. Let's go. Grab him, grab her, and just go have fun. There have been times when I have honestly had to look at Alisa and go, "We are going to the beach, and we're just going to go. You know, we don't have the kids."

Alisa doesn't like being cold, so in the winter months here in San Diego, and I know some of you are going to laugh, but it gets cold here for us, like in the 50s, and I still enjoy being at the beach. There's something about hearing the water and just walking on the beach. Alisa's cold. I get it, and at those times, I just go, "Let's go," because if I wait for her, she'll just say, "Well," she'll hem and haw. Once we're out there, we're having a blast. We're having a good time.

Now, we're not spending two hours on the beach. We may be grabbing a little bite, and then we're just doing a quick ten minute walk or we're hanging out on the cliffs up high and just sort of sitting in our car looking at the water and waves at night.

I think taking the lead in our marriage is important. Too often, I think Alisa said it was we're just sort of floating in the wind. Stand up for it. Go for it. Have the conversation; know that you guys are going to be doing this. I think you guys will enjoy your marriage and what you experience so much more because you're not waiting for your spouse to say yes or no to what you would like to try.

Alisa: The other part of this is that I would play him the section of this workshop that talks about Open Up and Be Vulnerable. I would share with him exactly what you've learned tonight, if he hasn't already been listening to this workshop. He may not feel yet that it's safe for him to voice his opinion or to even have an opinion. He may need to hear it repeatedly from you. It is okay to tell me that you don't want to do something. I will still decide whether or not I want to do it. If you want to listen to the marriage podcast, you can still listen to the marriage podcast. Hopefully it's the ONE Extraordinary Marriage show. But he needs to know that it's safe to have a different opinion, and the only way that's going to happen is if he hears it from you, and possibly even from the material from this workshop.

Tony: Next question. "Is the suggested 15 minutes per week for each or for both? Example, I have a topic, she has a topic for a total of 15-ish or 15-ish each."

We would suggest that if both of you have a topic, you're going to make 15 minutes of time in your schedule for both of you each week. It's 30 minutes. Make it happen, because it gets off balance if hey, I'm going to do my 15 minutes this week; you've got to wait for yours next week. Make it so that both of you are able to look at your topics, especially if they're State of Our Marriage type stuff. Hey, we're going to just schedule out 15 minutes for each of our topics for a total of 30 minutes in a week.

Believe me, that is not a lot of time. It really isn't. It's going to go by really quick, but you're going to see such growth in each other and in your marriage. It's well worth it. Remember, folks, when we talk about some of these things, like 15 minutes a week, or maybe it may be 30 minutes a week, we're not saying that you're going to be doing this forever and ever until you pass. This is for a season of life. You're going to be in a season. It may be a season where you need to spend 30 minutes a week or you may need to spend an hour a week.

Okay. But it's not forever. Alisa and I don't do a State of Our Marriage conversation every week anymore. We have gotten to the point where those big things, they're out, they're open, they're done. We've taken off the mask. We use I Feel, I Heard. We've done all that. We've extended grace, so when big things do come up; they're quick because we work through them. You're going to be able to do that as well.

We don't want you guys to sit here, because a lot of folks out there would be like whoa, you're going to be doing this forever and ever. No. Do it. I'm a road cyclist. It's like training for an event. You know, I train for an event. The event comes. I know where the end date, when I'm going to be doing it, and I work backwards, and I go okay, the event is at the end of June, I'm going to work backwards 8 weeks, and from that point, I'm going to do so many miles on Saturday, so many miles on Sunday. I'm going to be doing certain workouts during the week.

That may be for you guys. You guys may need an end date you may go, "Hey, you know what? We want to touch on all of these things by the end of 2014. How do we do that?" For some of you, it may be less. But don't think you're going to be doing this forever and ever. Don't. Please don't do that. That's not good for you guys.

Alisa: And remember, the 15 minutes, any time we throw out a number, that's a suggestion. You may find that you guys start talking for 15 minutes, and it's going well, and you want to go to 30. That's okay. Or you may find that you struggle getting to 15, so you may stay at 15.

You have to figure out what works for the two of you. These are suggestions.

Another question is, "Creating boundaries with in-laws has always been an issue for us, especially now that new chapters are opening in our lives. For a couple who has been married for a long time, how do we communicate boundaries with in-laws?"

We have been here. We have been here in spades on both sides, and one of the things that we've shared with you throughout this presentation is the skills that you can use with any relationship that you have. You can choose to use it with a boss. You can choose to use it with a friend, and yes, you can even choose to use it with your parents.

Now, I know, as I approach my 40th birthday, that there are still times when I get around my parents and I could be the 12 year old girl living in my house. Having these strategies is extremely beneficial, because you need to choose the battle. Figure out what is that topic that the two of you need to discuss with the in-laws? When are we going to have that conversation with

them? Sitting around the table at Thanksgiving is probably not the best time when you've got the audience of cousins and aunts and uncles.

Using I Feel and I Heard may be a little bit harder to get them to come on board with, but that doesn't mean that you can't use those tools. And you can share with them Palms Up. They may actually go for it. You also have to extend them grace. There are a lot of behavior patterns that we get into that are not effective, and this happens a lot of times with in-laws.

Tony and I have put such a boundary around our marriage at one point in time that we moved 1500 miles away because we were having in-law issues. That's how dramatic we got.

When the two of you become stronger as a unit, remember that a marriage is the union of two imperfect people, when those two people get on the same page and understand the dynamics that are going on in your own marriage, it makes it so much easier for the two of you to handle the dynamics that are going on in the extended family. It's not going to be easy. It's like I told a couple I was coaching with today. I told them, "The thing with family is that they are able to get under your skin like nothing else, and it's always going to be that way, and that's when you want to fall back on these tools to go okay, Choose My Battle, use I Feel, I Heard you, set up a time to talk, practice Palms Up, Extend Grace, Listen to Understand, Not to Interrupt.

This is the last question. "When I approach my spouse with a concern or issue, it is often taken as a criticism. How can I word it better so this does not happen?"

This is a common set of circumstances that a lot of couples have, and a lot of it is that perception, that agenda that we already have. It may come from your husband or wife's family, like any time something was said, anything constructive, it was said as a criticism, so that is their model. That's what they've heard.

It also depends on how you phrase it. Tone of voice is very important. Timing is very important. The timing and how you discuss this point with your spouse matters. If you're right in the moment, you're not doing that right; they're going to take that as criticism. If you can set up a time and say, "Honey, I want to talk about what's going on with how we're running our finances," or "I want to talk about what's going on with visiting your parents every weekend," or whatever it may be, and you share from your heart, using I Feel, remember that is a valuable tool, I feel X when you Y. The X is your feeling, the Y is their action.

Letting them know that this is a concern that you have, this is not a reflection on them, you're not picking on them, you are not judging them, this is something that you see as a concern or issue in your marriage, and you want their help – that's a key phrase – you want their help in solving this.

For those of you that were listening a little while ago when somebody asked the question about what do I do when my spouse wants to give me advice and I'm not ready for it, this is one of those times, tell them that you want the advice. How do we handle this situation? How do we

work together to make this better for both of us so that it's not a criticism, it's not a negative, but it becomes a positive, constructive in your marriage?

Tony: Folks, that wraps it up. We have answered all of our questions. We want to thank all of you for joining us here for He Zigs, She Zags: Get Your Communication on the Same Path. We hope that the COUPLE Communication Method will allow you to really dive into your marriage, dig deeper into specific communication issues that you are facing, and that way you can grow yourself and your marriage as you move forward.

If you want to contact us, you can go to OneExtraordinaryMarriage.com. We have a Contact Us tab right there. You can click it and email us directly. For some of you who are listening to this, you may be going, "Man, we have a little more that we need to work through and we may need somebody in there to help us work through it." If you are one of those folks, you can get a [Free 30-Minute Consultation Call](#) with Alisa and look at one challenge that you are facing, and she will share solutions with you that we can offer. Go to www.OneExtraordinaryMarriage.com/30minutes.

If you want more resources like our books, audio books, ebooks, and other programs, go to www.OneExtraordinaryMarriage.com/gethelp.

Again, thank you for joining us here for He Zigs, She Zags: Get Your Communication on the Same Path.