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He says, she says: Communication between the sexes can be difficult

By Aimee Heckel ([Contact](#))
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She says

Say what you want. Set your partner up for success, not a botched mind-reading game. Speak up. Soft-spoken women have a disadvantage when trying to persuade or negotiate. Try talking to a man side-by-side instead of face-to-face sometimes. Don't coil up. Assume a more relaxed position and create more "territory." Don't smile too much, especially if it might diminish your credibility. Be careful not to overdo your gestures. Make sure they match your verbal messages. Cut to the chase. A long story might not always be the most effective. Curb meaningless chatter, especially in business situations. Women can listen too

She wants flowers for Valentine's Day. A bouquet of wildflowers. Purple ones. But she doesn't tell him.

After all, if she told him, that would ruin the surprise. Plus, it might mean he just got her flowers because she asked him to — not because he wanted to out of the deep, loving reservoir of his heart.

And if she told him that, then he might only get her flowers because he's afraid that she's afraid that he was only getting her flowers because she asked.

Or something.

So she doesn't ask. She doesn't get flowers. And she's crushed. Seriously, what kind of guy can't magically read

"It's not bad or good," Nelson says. "It's a different culture."

For instance, when an American goes to Italy, she says, here are different cultural norms. It's not that one country's behavior is superior, but if you understand and adopt the other norms, you can get along easier.

When women (and men) say that men don't listen, they are wrong, Nelson says. Men listen differently.

Which leads to the most common pressure around Valentine's Day. Most likely, the woman has expectations, but she sets him up for failure by not telling him.

And men often struggle to express intimacy, falling back on what experts joke is one of the ten commandments of masculinity: "Thou shall not be vulnerable."

She suggests to men that they not only listen to what their partner says she wants, but also add a few unsolicited displays of affection, to maintain the surprise.

Nelson suggests to women that they say what they expect. Simply.

That's what Ginny Landes does. And as it turns out, Landes, 56, of Boulder, doesn't like Valentine's Day. She doesn't want to celebrate it, so she told her boyfriend.

But her birthday is coming up Feb. 24. And she expects something special then.

As for what her boyfriend expects on Valentine's Day? Landes laughs, because she forgot to ask him. She'll ask tonight, she says.

"Communicating is always a challenge. It's work," Landes says. "But it's good work."

Pam Hergett, 43, says she has been consciously expressing her needs for 16 years, since she was a newlywed and she first attended one of Nelson's gender communication classes.

This Valentine's Day, she says she no longer needs to say what she wants, because her husband knows. She says her husband will give her flowers. They will celebrate with their children. She'll send flowers to his office, too.

"I never expect him to read my mind," she says, adding that she's no expert. "We just don't play any

of those games."

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