

Mindreading and Dictating Motives

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The fourth and final conflict style that researchers have found that best predicts divorce is: Mindreading – Dictating the Motives of Others (or Negative Interpretation).

Years ago, I had a wife who turned to her husband in counseling and declared “The only reason you come to marriage counseling is to put on a show for the kids!” Clearly, she was telling him what he was thinking.

Why does Mindreading show up as a great predictor of divorce? It’s because it puts our mate into a **double bind**. They feel compelled to prove differently, but there is no way to do it (at least in the moment). The result is **despair** and **withdrawal**. So, here is a healthy ground rule to avoid mindreading...

We may doubt our loved one’s motives but not dictate them.

“Doubting motives” flips our judgement into a **question** and **not a declaration**. The question allows our loved one to have a voice – to speak for themselves.

Consider the wife I was counseling. If she had doubted her husband, she would have asked... **Is the reason you come to marriage counseling so you can put on a show for the kids? Because I don’t see much effort on your part!** Then he could answer the question and address her perceptions that he wasn’t making much effort.

Understanding:

When someone tells you what you are thinking they might be right. If so, practice some humility and own it. Other times they are really off the mark. They are putting something on you that is more about them – as in perhaps their fears or concerns. They are really telling you about themselves. Psychology calls this **projection**. The wife I counseled projected her feelings onto her husband. A more transparent message would have been, “I am really worried and fearful that you are not serious about our marriage. If that is true, I’m afraid that we will lose each other and our family. Do I need to worry about this?”

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This level of vulnerability and honesty would have resulted in the husband re-assuring his wife and comforting her. (I know because he eventually did. And he followed up with action.)

Responding to Mindreading:

Clearly - **defending, arguing, debating** or **withdrawing** only result in moving further apart. So...

- 1) **Establish a ground rule.** Ask “Will you agree with me that we won’t speak for each other or tell each other what we are thinking? We may **doubt** each other’s motives, but we won’t try to **dictate** or **declare** them.”
- 2) **Go to the emotion.** (When mindreading occurs.) Ask the person who is mindreading you what their concern is. (I like to find the exact emotion.) Ask, “Are you feeling **insecure**? Are you feeling that I don’t love you (i.e. **unloved**)? Are you feeling that you are **unimportant** to me?” (Asking these questions is much better than defending yourself.)

If they say “yes” then ask “May I reassure you? Tell you my love for you? Tell you what you mean to me?” (It’s the re-stating of your vows what many married women often call “**wedding vow stuff**”). Sometimes our mate does not want words; they want action (actions - that symbolize your love and responsiveness). Look for a concrete request of what they want. See the **Criticism to Requests** handout.

- 3) **Confront (kindly) the mindreading head-on.** Ask, “Do you remember our ground rule? I’d like for us to honor that.” You might say “I’m sure you wouldn’t want people telling what you think. You want to speak for yourself. Right? Well, so do I. May I speak for myself?” If you get a “Yes” then proceed. Speak for yourself using “I” messages.

(Watch out for using ‘history’ to make your point. That usually leads to **debating history**. This is where the conversation goes to arguing about what you did or didn’t do in the past. It’s a major rabbit trial! It sounds like “Did to” “Did not” ...on and on.)

Spiritual Insight:

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Mind reading and dictating motives is what the Bible calls being **judgmental**. God knows the heart of man. That's His job - not our job.

The Scripture teaches **"Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others you will be judged."** Matthew 7:1-2.

Paul makes the case of projecting very clear. He says that anyone who passes judgment is condemning themselves. **"... Because you pass judgment do the same things."** Romans 2:1

But **"speaking the truth in love"** (Ephesians 4:15) and asking politely and respectfully from God and others (i.e. making requests) is greatly encouraged.

Comfort for those who are judged unfairly...

Both Jesus and John the Baptist were the targets of being harshly judged and projected onto.

Jesus explained it this way...

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by all her children." Luke 7:33-44 NIV

Wow – this the classic double bind! They were falsely judged either way. Here is assigning motives at its height. John the Baptist is directly motivated by a demon and Jesus by gluttony and alcoholism. We can also call these attempts at “character assassinations”.

The passage ends with great comfort. **“But wisdom is proved right by all her children.”** Jesus is saying that the truth and integrity that you walk in will in the end be proven right.

Take the highroad even when others don't. Be driven by your principles and not the actions of others. Don't stoop to other people's poor levels. Don't judge others and politely confront those who judge you.

For more to read see **A Lasting Promise** by Scott Stanly

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