

Loud and clear

I think I'm in love. "With whom?" you may ask. With that female voice inside my GPS system!

In an earlier article I referenced the fact that I gave a week-long retreat at the Dominican Retreat House in up-state New York. What I didn't say was that I made the trip alone - except for that female voice. As anyone who travels knows, driving the Interstates is easy. Just follow the route signs. However, in those places around cities and through cities, life is a bit more difficult. She never failed me! What was most impressive about her is that she gave me directions, but never made me wrong. In other words, she told me what to do (does that sound familiar?) but never blamed me for mistakes. For example, as I was driving through Rotterdam and Niskayuna, "she" might say something like: "Turn left in 1/4 mile." By mistake, I might take the next left, thinking I had gone about 1/4 of a mile. Immediately, she would exclaim "Turn left! Turn left!" When I turned left she would say again: "Turn left!" It was then that I realized she was taking me back to where I started. I had turned too soon. She told me what she wanted me to do, but never blamed or shamed me for doing something wrong.

For example, she didn't say something like: "I told you to turn left in a mile, not 1/8 mile!" or "Why don't you listen to me?" Or worse, "You're not very smart!" She just told me what she wanted. She stayed loyal to me even when I strayed. Whenever I give my "Men from Mars, Women from Venus Talk," my talk on relationships, to Knights of Columbus or Holy Name, or Sodality or Home School, or on retreats, I always emphasize that men thrive on appreciation, and wither under criticism. Like the lady in my GPS, I tell the ladies to praise a man for all the things you like, but don't criticize him for what he does wrong! In other words, praise the behavior you like. You'll get more of it! If you spend time criticizing behavior you don't like, you'll likely get anger and resentment. In addition to not criticizing me, my GPS girl did something else. She told me what she wanted!

"Turn left!" Women often have a hard time asking clearly for what they want. The wonderful counselor and lecturer, Carne Hanson, said in her keynote address at the Single Again Conference in Columbia that "The biggest romantic myth is 'If you

loved me, you would know what I wanted.’ That myth causes untold, unnecessary misery in marriage. Women won’t ask – and they blame their spouse for not knowing!”

Carrie continued, “Instead, the opposite is true: ‘If you really loved me, you would tell me ‘what you wanted!’ “

My GPS lady told me what she wanted. I was thrilled to please her. On the other side of the ledger, one of the most important things men can do for women is to listen to them. If men thrive on appreciation, women thrive on being listened to. I always tell men, “Never try to ‘fix’ your spouse. Just listen to her. If a woman is listened to, she feels respected, understood, cared about and special. She will forgive your mistakes if she knows that you’re listening to her concerns. By listening to her, you are being a partner to her, rather than a mechanic trying to fix her. So my trip to Niskayuna turned out to be a chance to practice what I preached. As a wise person said, “How we do anything is how we do everything.” I listened to the female inside my GPS. She told me what she wanted and I was happy to follow her instructions. When I did something wrong, she spent no time at all “making me wrong,” but simply showed me a better way. I felt appreciated. She felt respected. Stay tuned for news of an upcoming marriage!