

The Five Love Languages

Gary Chapman in his Five Love Languages series has come up an answer that I find meaningful.

According to Chapman there are five love languages, and while we all need all five, one is usually more important to us than all the others. You may have been lucky enough to have been showered with your primary love language as a child and now as a grown up.

But I imagine that there are many of us who felt an emptiness that never seemed to get filled. I knew my parents loved me but I realize now that it was words of affirmation that I craved from my father. It just wasn't his way of expressing love. He worked hard and provided for all my needs through acts of service, but I still longed for those words that told me I was special to him. I only heard them indirectly through my mother,

Even though the Five Love Languages series are not personality type books, I feel they are valuable. They are a bit evangelical as that is the style of the author. He gives seminars and workshops on his works that are available in video.

I think that his ideas are worth knowing about, and there may be occasions in our work as counselors and facilitators when an understanding of his ideas might clarify a situation that a client might have. So often when a problem occurs between people, it isn't a lack of love, rather it was how the love was expressed that was the problem.

The Five Love Languages by Gary Chapman

Life's deepest meaning is not found in accomplishments but in relationships. Relationships enrich our lives. We can feel proud of our accomplishments but we want to share our accomplishments with others, particularly those who are important to us, our significant other, our children, our family members and our friends.

We all want to know that we are loved. We want to be able to express our feelings of love to others so that they know of our love for them. We would feel hurt if the ones we loved told us that they didn't feel loved by us. So often key relationships fail because one or the other just did not feel loved or cared for.

A wife may complain that her husband does not love her. When questioned he is dumbfounded. Of course he loved her. Didn't he spend all those long hours working so that she could have whatever she desired? Her reply is that all she ever desired was some of his undivided attention. Each loved the other but didn't express it in a way that was meaningful.

We feel we try so hard to show our love, but if we don't feel loved in return, we feel empty or disappointed. It may be that we are not expressing our love or caring in a way that is meaningful to the other person. Similarly, we may have a sense that the other person loves or cares for us, but we just feel empty. Their love and caring has not been expressed in a way that is satisfying to us.

When we first are in a relationship, there is an initial attraction that draws us together. We fall madly in love with someone, we see our new born child, we have a special bond with a family member, or we meet someone and develop a special friendship. All goes well for a while and the experience is wonderful. Our lover can do no wrong. Our newborn is perfect and will grow up to conquer the world.

Grandma always has a cookie for us. Our new friends are fascinating. There is actually a hormone called oxytocin that mother releases in her body at the time of the birth of her child that helps her bond with the child. Maybe this hormone is released in all of us at key times to give us a sense of well being that helps us bond with one another. Unfortunately, after a period of time reality sets in. For lovers this can last up to two years. Then we notice that our lovers have several very annoying and obnoxious habits, and we are no longer the center of their world. Our children have become little brats. Grandma is always scolding us for not wiping our feet when we come in from outside. Our friends seems to take us for granted and don't seem quite as interesting as they once were.

It is as if we have a love tank for each of our relationships. When we feel loved and cared for, the gauge on the tank registers full. When we feel unappreciated, the gauge can register dangerously low or empty.

Gary Chapman, author of *The Five Love Languages*, through his counseling has found that there are five main love languages: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service and physical touch. The other important insight of his work is that while we need all of these forms of love to a certain extent, there is probably one, or perhaps a couple, that are crucial to our feeling loved and cared for. If they are missing, then we feel empty. The other person may have tremendous love for us, but we don't experience it as being loved. We need to feel love from others in the way that is meaningful to us. So it is important to learn what our primary love language is.

The same is true for other people. We can show tremendous love for them but if we are not expressing it in the form that is meaningful to them, and then they feel empty and abandoned. That is not what we wanted at all, but that is how it is experienced by them. Since we love and care for many people in our lives, we need to learn to develop all five love languages and express them appropriately.

We also need to discover the specific love language that is most important to the people we love so that we can use it with them. We can observe what other people respond to. What is it that seems to give them joy? We can tell them how we read this book on *The Five Love Languages* and wondered what they thought their main love language was. Tell them that they are important to us and we would like to make sure they felt loved or their friendship was important to us.

Of course, we also want to receive the love from others in the language that is most important to us. Perhaps others are willing to discuss the love languages and we can share what really matters to us. Sometimes, we have to be direct and tell others how they can best show us that they love us. "Mary, you often are very blunt about telling me how I might improve. Sometimes you are right and I appreciate your trying to help me. I would feel so much closer to you if you told me what I do that you like. It would give me the energy to make the changes I need to make to improve my life. And our

relationship”.

Words of Affirmation: Words can have a tremendous impact on our feelings.

We may have grown up in a positive or negative emotional environment. If it was a positive atmosphere, usually giving words of affirmation come easily to us. If it was negative, we will have to make a conscious effort to come up with the right words at the right moment.

Sometimes we can be very critical. While criticism may at times be justified, it rarely is affirming. We may have to search for the nugget of gold that is hidden within the other person. The interesting thing is that as we emphasize the positive, it encourages the other person to be more positive in return. Of course, there is a fine line between being sincere and manipulation. We have to be able to make a positive comment with integrity. For instance a wife may nag her husband to clean out the garage. She always is on his case for one thing or another. He is feeling his love tank is very empty. He never hears affirming words from his wife. Now suppose she tells him how much she appreciates how hard he works to provide for the family, and she makes it a point to comment frequently on all his positive qualities. Lo and behold, the next thing she knows, he has cleaned up the garage.

Of course he knew the garage needed cleaning. He wasn't putting off the job to be spiteful. Now his wife's positive comments were what he needed to give him the energy and desire to go and complete the job. If the wife is wise, she will heap praise on him for his diligence in getting the job done.

There are few different of ways of giving words of affirmation: encouragement, praise, and kind words, we can never go wrong with giving words of affirmation. If this is not the dominant love language of the other person, it just has less impact, but it is still appreciated. There is an old joke about a man saying, “Of course I love you. If it ever changes, then I'll let you know. Why do I have to keep saying it all the time.”? The point is that the other person needs to have it

repeated often. If the man loves the other person, he needs to make the effort to say it as frequently as it is needed.

Quality Time: Spending time with others enriches both of us.

However, the phrase “quality time” sometimes gets overworked. Busy parents are told that as long as children have quality time with them, it will be all right. Little children need as much time as possible with caring adults. That is where they learn to bond with others and that the world is a safe and loving place. In reality quality time is more than just being around someone to make it. Quality time means giving others your undivided attention.

Quality time means being available. This means stopping our busy schedules and devoting time to the relationship. It means connecting with the other person so that they know we are there for them. It is a time when we talk about things that are important to us. It can be a conversation that is interesting to both of us. It can be a time to share our problems without the other person trying to solve them but just listening. It can be doing something that we both enjoy.

Sometimes we put ourselves out for the other person. We make the effort to appreciate their world. We go to the symphony concert because we know that person enjoys going, and we try to understand why it is important to the other person, even when that kind of music is not to our taste at all.

Giving someone quality time is done without expectation of something in return. The beauty of it is that so often we are blessed by others willing to share quality time with us.

Receiving Gifts: A gift says that we care enough to make the effort to bring pleasure to the other person.

To be effective the gift must be something that will please the other person. Just any old thing handed to the other person doesn't count, and in fact can even be considered an insult.

What does the other person like?

Have they a collection that you can add to?

Have they mentioned something that you can get for them?

Is it a special occasion, which needs to be commemorated with a gift: birthday, anniversaries, special holiday or event?

Does the person like to have surprise gifts that are totally unexpected?

Even courting birds sometimes bring a gift of a special pebble or a twig for a nest. Cultures all over the world give gifts as a sign of friendship and love. As children we loved to receive presents. When relatives came, we may have been so bold as to ask what they brought us. We may have been scolded for being so rude. But we still may be excited when we are brought a gift for no particular reason. It really hits home when the gift is something we have wanted or it is so unique that it delights us. Be sure to give gifts with some ceremony so that others know they were meant as tokens of love.

If we feel others are felt loved by receiving gifts, now we have to take into consideration their needs and tastes. Spontaneous gifts have a great impact. We see something in a store that we know a friend would like. We buy it and give it to them. However, we do want to make sure that the gift is appropriate. We don't want the other person to feel a sense of obligation through our gift.

Acts of Service: When we do something for another person because we love and care for them, this is an act of service. It may be something that we do for others on a regular basis, such as a mother who cooks meals for her family. It may be taking a friend to a doctor's appointment. It may be offering to pick up something from the store on our way to work.

What can you do for other people? What can they do for you? Often, people are only too happy to lend a hand. They just need to be told what it is that they can do. We also need to be observant to see what we can do without being asked.

Contracts such as "if you do this for me then I'll do this for you" are not acts of love. They may be quite valid in their own right but don't

count as far as filling up love tanks. Also, statements such as “look at all I have done for you” are attempts at manipulation. To show love through acts of service they must be done unconditionally. We must give them without expecting anything in return. Then we may be delighted and surprised that others will do things for us without any expectations as well.

Physical Touch: We all need physical touch. As we came into the world it was touch that was the first message of love. Touch is an absolute essential. After World War II there were a number of babies in orphanages in Europe that were well cared for but they were not thriving. It was discovered when staff or volunteers took the time to just hold the babies, they began to thrive again. For some of us this is our primary language of expressing and experiencing love. In a romantic relationship physical love is most important, but we also need the touches and caresses during our daily lives that let us know we are cherished.

Physical touch is regulated by cultural custom but even here there is a wide range of expression. When talking with you some people seem to involuntarily reach over and touch. How and when we touch must be guided by understanding what and when it is appropriate. When a person seems to flinch and draw back at our touch, this is a clear signal that now is not the time. The touch that at one time our children craved now in adolescence can send a signal that we still are treating them like children. The manner of our touches needs to change. The teenager whose primary language of love is physical touch still wants to be touched. It is now our job to find how to we can touch and still respect their integrity.

The world we live in can often seem impersonal. We need to reach out and touch one another. Our homes, meeting our friends, greeting others in gatherings all provide opportunities for touch.

In Summary: Each of knows the importance of love in our lives. We want to show our love to those we care about, yet sometimes that message doesn't seem to get across to them.

The Five Love Languages shows us that not everyone feels loved in the same way. It makes us aware that there are these differences.

Now our task is to learn to express our love in these five different ways so that we are fluent in all five languages. Our other task is to discern which language each of our loved ones responds to and use our newfound skills in expressing that love in the way that is most meaningful to the other person.

If our motives are sincere, it is always a true expression of our innermost feelings for those we love. We too respond to all of the five love languages. However, some just give us a slight warm fuzzy feeling, but we all have one that gives us that inner glow that tells us that we are truly loved. We all want to have our loved ones know that same feeling. That is why it is worth all the effort.

What is your love language?