

7 ~ *Gaining Confidence: Using Character Quality Language*

One effective tool to influence and strengthen character qualities in yourself and one another is to incorporate these qualities into your daily speech. This means actively and joyfully looking for them both in your own actions and attitudes and one another. Clearly seeing these qualities gives you opportunities to affirm and encourage them. Look at the difference in these two statements:

First Statement:

It's nice that you did the dishes.

Alternative That Uses Character Quality Language:

Thank you for doing the dishes even though it was my turn. It was very *thoughtful* of you...my day was difficult. I especially appreciate that you were so *careful* with the new china. (Qualities of Thoughtfulness and Caring)

There's nothing wrong with the first interaction, and your spouse would likely feel appreciated. However, the second *affirms* his/her character and shows the application of the qualities in daily life. Here's another example:

First Statement:

Thanks for listening about my problems at work.

Alternative That Uses Character Quality Language:

I feel much more *peaceful* now that we've talked about what I'm going through at work. It means a lot to me that you *sincerely* listen to me and *care* about me. (Qualities of Peacefulness, Sincerity, and Caring)

Sincere character quality language can build confidence and self-respect and assist you to nurture character development in yourself and others.

To Consider: When you praise or encourage someone, it loses its effectiveness if it is in the form of a comparison that says, "You are better than someone else." Your tone of voice and phrasing are also important so that there isn't implied criticism underneath the praise about how your spouse did the action the last time [Example: It was thoughtful of you to FINALLY do the dishes].

Also, it is important to have pure motives in these interactions and not be manipulative or controlling. The goal is to be loving, honest, and sincere.



Some people believe they shouldn't have to thank their spouse, that he or she was fulfilling a responsibility. This belief is usually ineffective in a marriage. Most partners like to be thanked, even for fulfilling their responsibilities....

There are three kinds of positive messages: appreciation, affirmation, and praise...

Appreciation is an expression of pleasure from the speaker's point of view. The message is "I value (like, enjoy) what you did." Appreciation is easy to communicate and rewarding to receive. Appreciation is commonly used by many people, so it is familiar. Appreciation tells another person that his or her deed was noticed and it benefited the speaker. Appreciation can motivate a partner to repeat the behavior because most partners enjoy pleasing their spouse.

An *affirmation* is an expression of empathy and understanding from the receiver's point of view. The message is "You have used a lot of effort (courage, integrity, skill, talent, endurance, for example) in your actions." Affirmations validate a person's motives and efforts, and validation is an important building block of identity. They are a communication of empathy...: "I see your good intentions." Although affirmations are not commonly communicated between spouses, they can be a powerful demonstration of understanding and acceptance. Our identity flourishes in the presence of someone who is affirming. We bond with persons who recognize the best in us and can experience God's presence in the relationship.

Praise is the speaker's evaluation of the receiver's behavior. Praise means, "You performed well." Praise is valuable in a marriage if it is used appropriately. Praise is used appropriately when both spouses recognize that one is more experienced or skilled in an area, such as a mother's understanding of care for toddlers or a husband's knowledge about cars. Praise can acknowledge the receiving partner's accomplishment. Praise should be used only as long as one spouse is in an apprentice or learner role. The problem with praise is that it can be a subtle message of superiority because it implies the person doing the praising is a more qualified judge. If praise is the only positive message used, the partner receiving praise can feel uncomfortable because of the implication of inferiority. Appreciation and affirmations should be generously applied to soften the judgmental nature of praise.

~ Sandra Gray Bender, Ph.D., *Recreating Marriage with the Same Old Spouse*, pp. 111-112, 115



Language has great influence to empower or discourage. Self-respect is built when shaming or blaming language is replaced by naming the Virtues, our innate qualities of character. Virtues are used to acknowledge, guide, and correct. The Language of Virtues helps us remember what kind of people we want to be.

~Linda Kavelin Popov, *The Family Virtues Guide*, p. 19

Editor's Note About Sample Text: Each of the 52 Character Qualities in the book is set up according to this format. At the top of each of the sections is a quote from one of the world's religious scriptures: Bahá'í, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Zoroastrian.

Courtesy

TO UNDERSTAND

And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. ~ Christianity: *The Bible* (KJV), Luke, 10:5



Courtesy is the gracious and loving way we interact with one another and the people around us. Through our gestures and words, we let one another know that we genuinely value the integrity of our relationship. We show we care by being polite, considerate, and using good manners. Sometimes when we feel stressed or in a hurry, it is even more important to remember courtesy, so we don't hurt one another's feelings by being short-tempered or giving orders. One way we are courteous is using polite expressions such as "Please" and "Thank You," and we make requests instead of demands. Courtesy provides loving smoothness to our interactions within our marriage and demonstrates an abiding love that strengthens and uplifts our relationship.



Small kindnesses, small courtesies, small considerations, habitually practiced in our social intercourse, give a greater charm to the character than the display of great talents and accomplishments.

~ Mary Ann Kelty, *Treasury of Women's Quotations*, p. 54

What does Courtesy look like to us?

How might it benefit us to develop Courtesy in our marriage? How can the strengthening and moderating qualities below assist us with practicing it to the best of our ability?

Strengthening Qualities: Caring, Compassion, Friendliness, Generosity, Gentleness, Helpfulness, Humility, Love, Patience, Respect, Service, Sincerity, Thoughtfulness

Moderating Qualities: Assertiveness, Confidence, Equality, Justice, Purposefulness, Truthfulness

1. What expressions and actions truly demonstrate courtesy?
2. When is courtesy most difficult for us to practice? How can we shift this so it is easier to practice at difficult times?
3. What would the gift of courtesy bring to our relationship?

We commit to act in a mannerly way and show respect and kindness toward one another, even when we are having a difficult time.



TO PRACTICE

- ♥ Consciously say “please,” “thank you,” and “you’re welcome” for every service we do for one another for a week and then discuss how it worked and how we felt about it
- ♥ Plan a formal dinner with guests and assist one another with using our best manners and courtesy
- ♥ Show one another that we care through our courteous actions, such as assisting with exiting a vehicle, holding a door open, or running an errand
- ♥ When we are frustrated with one another, interact with courtesy and after calming down, then discuss how it worked, sharing honestly our feelings about why we were frustrated
- ♥ Others?

