

No Need to Nag

“How many times do I have to ask you to fix the bathroom tap?”

“Why do you always wait until the last minute to tell me you need a packed lunch?”

“This is the third time this week my dinner has been cold! What’s your problem?”

“I can’t believe you forgot the bread . . . again. Don’t you ever listen?”

“Nag, nag, nag. All you ever do is nag!”



NAGGING DOUBTS

Nagging . . . probably we've all done it, at least once or twice. Especially when we feel stressed, overloaded, and unsupported. Nagging could be defined as "offering repeated reminders with ever-increasing frustration and urgency." But the problem isn't just frequency. Our tone of voice may be sarcastic, irritated, frustrated, resigned, or angry. Nagging puts the other person down. The implied message:

"I'm better than you are."

"I'm more self-controlled/more thoughtful/more careful than you."

"I think you're just stupid/incompetent/rude/inconsiderate."

"You'll never get it right/be good enough."

BETTER TO LIVE ON THE ROOF

Nagging negative comments grind away at the love and joy in our relationships. When we use our words carelessly, we end up tearing each other down rather than building each other up (Eph. 4:29).

Even the wise and powerful King Solomon apparently got nagged occasionally! It clearly wasn't good for his relationships either, since he thought it was better to live on the roof than with a nagging wife (Prov. 21:9)!

THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY?

Nagging and criticizing are some of the *least* effective ways to encourage someone to change behavior or do something we want. Nagging can imply that the other person is lazy, inadequate, or unhelpful. Being nagged can make our loved ones feel rebellious, stubborn, and even *less* like helping. Or they may help reluctantly and resentfully.

Appreciation can be much more effective. The power of kindness works like a sculptor, with each stroke gently smoothing the clay toward the desired shape. When you appreciate someone for the tiniest thing, they are more likely to want to do it again, and to do it cheerfully and willingly. Try it and see!

TURN COMPLAINTS INTO REQUESTS

Write your nag down. Read it carefully and then rewrite it as a simple, clear, and polite request. "Would you stop walking all over my clean kitchen floor with your dirty shoes!" might become, "Please take your shoes off and leave them at the doorstep so we can keep the kitchen floor clean."

Ask yourself how you might make the same request to a guest who was visiting your home. The polite version is likely to leave everyone feeling happier.

SCALE IT DOWN

Make a task list, then draw three columns beside it.

In the first column rate *how urgent* the task is on a scale of 1-5, where 5 is "very urgent."

In the second column, rate *how important* the task is on a scale of 1-5, where 5 is "very important."

Use the third column to add the two scores together. The highest scores are the things that need to be done first.

How important is it to fill the car with gas each week, tidy the kitchen by bedtime, or have a perfect home by sunset on Friday night? If one of you thinks a task is very important and rates it as a 5, but the other person thinks it's not so important and rates it as a 2, it will be helpful to talk about your different priorities in a calm, non-judgmental way.

WRITE IT DOWN

Make a shared "To Do" list. Agree on how often you'll each check the list, do a task, and cross it



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off. Having a written list means that you don't have to remind each other so often. The list does the nagging for you in a much nicer way—as long as you don't nag each other to check the list!

ONCE IS ENOUGH

"I just ask once," says Paula. "I choose a good time to talk to Mark, make sure I have his full attention, and then tell him I have a problem and need his help. I show him what needs to be done, and then he decides how and when he'll fix it. Asking once like this means I don't have to nag, and it gives him the freedom to choose the best time in his schedule."

"TO DO" DATE

"We have 'To Do' dates!" says Tim. "We sit down together on a Sunday evening, share dessert, and make a list of everything that needs to be done in the week ahead. We decide who's going to do what, and then we spend the evening tackling the list and doing the worst jobs together so neither one feels so bad!"

BE CREATIVE

Find enjoyable, respectful, and caring ways to remind each other. "We found these crazy kids' toys," says Sandra. "You can write messages on them with washable markers and toss them in the laundry to wipe them clean. So we have one each and we write our 'requests' on them. Then we hide them for the other person to find. I know it sounds crazy, but it makes us laugh!"

DO IT YOURSELF

Are you nagging your husband to paint the bedroom, or your wife to iron your pants? Why not learn how to do it yourself?

Ella realized that learning to decorate a home was going to be useful because they moved so often. She attended a free class at the local home-decorating store and soon had the confidence to try painting a bedroom.

Tom and Lily decided to teach each other useful skills so they could both cook a meal, unplug the sink, fix the washing machine, iron a shirt and pants, check the car's oil, mow the lawn, etc. This helped them become more efficient as a couple and spend their energy getting jobs done rather than being frustrated at each other.

Think about your relationship:

- What do you remind your spouse about most frequently?
- Why do you think you're most likely to focus on this area?
- What do you think would invite your spouse to help you more often or more cheerfully?
- Which ideas listed above do you think might work best for you? **J**

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