



Wendy Trainor  
*communication and healing*

## Catch your partner doing something right

Negative interpretations occur when one partner consistently believes that the motives of the other are more negative than is really the case. When relationships are in trouble, people tend to discount the positive things their partners do and see the negatives as further proof of a negative belief they are holding. Most people do not set out to do things to intentionally frustrate their partners.

Both research and experience tell us that people tend to see what they expect to see. If we hold a belief that our partner is thoughtless, we will only notice those events which support this view. We all tend to look for information that confirms what we expect from others. We end up viewing positive behaviour in a negative light and seeing any negative behaviour as proof of poor intentions on the part of our partner, even if that were not the case. These mistaken beliefs are difficult for our partners to overcome. We cannot hear what they are trying to tell us if we are not willing to entertain the idea that their motives may be more positive than those we are attributing to them.

Negative interpretations are reflective of issues that we need to confront within ourselves. We may need to look at some of the messages we got growing up to get a better understanding of where these beliefs have come from. For example, many of us grew up in homes where there were very high standards. We heard messages such as: "If you cared, you would notice when I need help and pitch in and do it." When we transfer this thinking to our current relationships, we think our partner does not care when he or she does not anticipate our needs or perform tasks up to our standards.

In long-term relationships, we often need to acknowledge that our partner's motives are more positive than we may have previously considered. We need to give our partners the benefit of the doubt. In most cases, they too want to make things better.

A useful exercise is to "catch your partner doing something right." This weekend, agree to note all the things your partner does that you appreciate. Be sure to tell your partner, very clearly, what they have done that you have appreciated. Too often our appreciations go unspoken and our resentments and disappointments are verbalized and underlined.

(These concepts are developed in: *Fighting for Your Marriage* by H. Markman, S. Stanley and S. Bloomberg)

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