

## The Waffles and Spaghetti Key

One of the best analogies I've ever heard to help men and women understand how each other think is the picture of waffles and spaghetti. This is not my original idea but whoever thought of it was a genius – and hungry!

I frequently use this analogy in therapy to help couples understand each other. The premise is this: Men are like waffles in the fact that they have all these little boxes in their brains. They have a work box and a family box; they have a *get ready in the morning* box and a *watch YouTube* box; they have a date night box and a sports box; and yes, ladies, they even have a *nothing* box. And my, how wonderful it is!

Just like syrup can only fill one box at a time, men can only work in one box at a time. When men move from one box to the other, they completely close the previous box behind to focus on the current box at hand.

Women, conversely, are like spaghetti. All their thoughts (and sometimes emotions) are mixed together like noodles, on top of one another, intertwined together, linking all over the place. A woman's brain works like this:

*What a pretty red dress she's wearing today! It kind of looks like the red dress that Robert told me he liked when I wore it at that Italian place the other night. We went to another Italian place three months ago and I caught him ogling the waitress! He's such a pig!*

I kid you not, I've seen women triggered by articles of clothing on mannequins that reminded them of something their husbands did in the past!

Spaghetti and waffles each have their pros and cons. Women are normally better multi-taskers but work more slowly, while men can finish one project more quickly because he's singularly focused. Spaghetti helps women remember details; waffles help men deal better with stress because they can usually "turn it off" (shut the box).

But our focus here is waffles. Now *I'm* hungry!

A big complaint I hear on my counseling couch is that guys don't hear their women. Men can be on the game, working in the shop, watching cat videos, and be completely oblivious to everything going on around them. The house is on fire, the kids are being kidnapped, the police are banging on the door, but the man doesn't notice!

His *waffling* is the reason why. He's in the box and all he notices is what's in the box!

When you were a kid, do you remember your parents getting an appliance delivered? Maybe it was a refrigerator, or an oven, and it came in a big box. You'd get in the box and pretend it was your house waiting for your imaginary six-year-old husband to join you in the box. What did you see while you were in the box? Nothing but the four cardboard walls.

When your man is in the box, he really doesn't see anything else. And it's not his fault. And it's not your fault.

He isn't trying to ignore you (most times); he isn't being necessarily inattentive; he isn't completely self-absorbed and selfish (hopefully). He's simply sitting inside his waffle box and that's all he sees.

At their core, men are doers; and they do projects well because they are 100% committed to the task. Their energy and attention are usually undivided because they are totally immersed in the specific box they are mentally working in. And being the simple creatures that they are, most men work in one box at a time. When they're done in that box, they close it and move on to the next one.

*That's horrifying!* you're probably thinking. I know right? How we can live without all those details, details, details I'll never know!

The big advantage for you in his waffle box thinking is that if you can get him out of the waffle box, into the YOU box, he'll be (mostly) yours!

### **Getting Him into the YOU Box**

So, how do we get men out of the work box, kid box, game box, sports box and into the YOU box? I think good timing is essential.

Men are very linear in their thinking. They go to work at a certain time, come home at a certain time, eat at a certain time, have sporting events at a certain time, even poop at a certain time. If a man is in his PlayStation box and you try to force him out of it to pay attention to you, he's going to get resentful, at best, or angry, at worst. But if you and he establish a designated time or routine for each other that

works for both of you, in his thinking he'll see the "couple box" coming up on his timeline and more easily transition into it.

Prepping the couple box doesn't have to be hard either. Appealing to his masculine ego, you can say something like, "Honey, I need your help with our relationship. Maybe we can sit down on Tuesdays after dinner, and I can get your input on how we can communicate better. And you know what better communication leads to, right? (Insert a wink and a smile here).

As you involve him in the process and set a time together to communicate, you'll be amazed at how much more easily he opens up. You'll start to unlock your man because you've created a box with him, and he clearly knows when he's supposed to get into it!

"But I want him to be spontaneous and do it because he loves me! Not because it's scheduled!"

He loves you, my dear, but he prefers to prep himself mentally for your emotions, rather be caught off guard. Men love to be prepared. Conversations with women are often terrifying for men because most men don't perform linguistically as quickly as the ladies do. So having a time and place for emotional conversations help him out tremendously.

Another thing women can do to get their men into the relationship box is to foster an atmosphere that minimizes distractions, especially when having deep conversations. Try to make sure the kids are in bed and all electronic

devices are off. It's harder to talk to a man when other distractions are in the forefront of his thinking. He must get himself out of those boxes mentally to be present with you.

Creating a relaxed space can often help unlock your man. Since men are fixers, if they see a problem in their environment, they are going to immediately look for solutions. So, try to create a distraction-free environment as much as possible if you want his full attention. Unfortunately, you may have to take more of the initiative to make this happen, at least in the beginning. As he gets accustomed to opening up and being more confident in his communication, emotionally connective conversations should become more commonplace.

### **Don't Judge the Waffle**

Women often push their men back into their waffle boxes by demanding they come out of them.

“Pay attention to me!”

Maybe you don't say it like that, but we all know you think it. I can understand your frustration. You would think that after eight agonizing hours away from you at work, he'd walk in the door and straight into your open arms! What usually happens is he comes home acting like the walking dead, traumatized from a day of deadlines, demands and dictators.

We can all be stubborn, but asking your man to immediately make the switch from work to family life can only slow the process and make him resentful. When men say, “Give me a few minutes,” they really mean it! It's not

like he needs a massage or a two-hour bubble bath; what he's really saying is he needs a few minutes to close the work box. I counsel men who have a hard time getting out of the work box into the marriage and family box to take a few moments in the car, even while they sit in the driveway, to mentally make the adjustment.

I know you're frazzled and at your wit's end with your own job, kids, housework, etc., but the last thing he needs when he walks in the door is for you to immediately throw a colicky baby in his arms. Give him a few minutes to sit down, make the mental switch, and get it in gear for round two with the wife and kids. The small amount of time you give to let him switch boxes will reap big returns in his time and attention towards you and your family.