

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My husband and I are as different as we can be. We both work hard at our jobs and spend lots of time with our kids. During the week, we get along just fine. But on weekends, we argue. He is laid back and enjoys nothing more than watching television. On the other hand, I spend my spare time taking classes and being involved in activities that challenge me and make me think. He says that I am a workaholic, and that I don't know how to relax. I say he is lazy and lacks ambition. With the exception of this one issue, we get along very well and share responsibility for raising our kids and keeping up with housework and chores. Still, our weekends usually include at least one argument where I'm telling him to get away from the tube, and he's telling me to chill out. Is there a way to resolve this big difference in our personalities?

-- Donna

Dear Donna,

Viva la difference! Why is it so important that you are in sync with your husband about how you both spend your spare time? I can see how this would be a problem if you spent weekends scrubbing the baseboards and spending time with the kids, while hubby is sprawled out on the sofa, munching chips, and watching sports.

You seem to share the same priorities, as well as the responsibilities, of family, work and chores. So, we're talking about how each of you chooses to spend your limited free time (after household tasks and kid activities), aren't we? I rather like the way the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke described love. He said, "Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other." To me, the operative word here is "solitudes." Just because we have a happy marriage or partnership does not mean that we have to become attached at the hip, each enjoying the exact same activities or at an identical pace. I think Rilke was talking about the old Ira Gershwin lyric, "You say tomato, I say tomahto..." You both have different interests and ideas about what you want to do once your work and chores are completed. That difference could be celebrated, rather than it becoming something that puts a wedge between you.

In a way, each of you represents the "shadow" of the other. This is a concept that psychologist Carl Jung talked about while referring to the unconscious, un-lived part of each of us. When we see something in others, that we do not accept in ourselves (e.g., being a lazy slug on the weekends), we often have an emotional reaction that is a bit out of proportion.

I must admit I share your bias that television watching can become something of a "soft addiction" and suck up all our free time. A little bit can go a long way. But, the good news here is that you and your husband have a lot to teach each other. Maybe you need to lighten up and spend some time just vegging out, and your husband might need to discover that he has other, more intellectual and ambitious strivings that get little conscious attention from him. By learning from each other, (without trying to "control" each other's free time) you both might find your way toward a new, more balanced "middle way." There's a lot to be said for this kind of equilibrium between taking on new

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challenges and finding time to just be, relax, and not accomplish anything in particular. I always liked the way the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu described the importance of finding the middle, finding the balance between opposites. He said, "He who tip-toes cannot stand; he who strides cannot walk."

Write me again (after chores, kids, and, hopefully, some romantic and alone time with your husband) and let me know if your husband is taking a class in existential philosophy while you snack on pretzels and enjoy reruns on the Lifetime Channel!

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.