

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I'm the mother of four children under the age of ten. In spite of all I do to raise the kids, keep the house clean, wash laundry, and prepare home-cooked meals, my husband never seems to notice what I do. He'll often ask, "What did you do all day?" when dinner is a bit late, or the laundry hasn't been put away and he can't find his socks. He's an excellent provider, a fantastic father, and a good man, but I wish he would show more appreciation for what I contribute to our family. Any suggestions?

-- Melanie

Dear Melanie,

Mary Kay Ash – a successful businesswoman, enlightened people person and the founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics – once said, “There are two things that people want more than sex and money...recognition and praise.” Mary Kay was right. Sex and money are great, but no one wants to feel taken for granted. It is normal to want our accomplishments and efforts to be acknowledged. I don't hear you asking your husband to present you with a plaque denoting your achievements, give you the employee of the month parking spot, or take you on a cruise to the Caribbean for all you do. You don't sound as if you are psychologically needy, demanding that everyone admire and appreciate you every moment of every day. Instead, you are asking for a simple “thank you,” and an acknowledgement that the good work that you do every day matters to your family. This is a healthy and reasonable request.

Unfortunately, moments of recognition are few and far between in our American society. Just think about it. It is the rare supervisor who takes note of what employees are doing right and gives praise. In many families – like yours – essential contributions are noticed more when they are absent, than when we meet our responsibilities every day. Everyone likes to be reminded that they're doing something right, that they're contributions are important.

I once heard a story about a couple that divided their chores along traditional lines just as you do in your family. The homemaker mom stayed home with young kids, and the husband went to work at his job. One evening the man came home to find total mayhem. The kids were outside, still in their pajamas, playing in the mud with candy wrappers strewn around the front yard. When the man went into the house, the TV was blaring a cartoon channel, and the family room was covered with clothes and toys. Dishes filled the kitchen sink, breakfast food was spilled on the counter, and grimy fingerprints covered the refrigerator door. Afraid that something had happened, the man ran into the bedroom to find his wife lounging in bed, reading a novel. “What happened here?” he asked. His wife looked up, casually: “You know every day when you come

home from work and ask me what in the world did I do today?” “Yes,” he said. “Well, today I didn’t do it!”

I’m not suggesting that you go on strike, like the woman in this story, but it wouldn’t hurt to remind your husband that you’d appreciate having your good work noticed once in a while. Offer to let him have a go at your responsibilities. I wonder how he might fare for even one day with taking care of four kids, doing housework, washing laundry, and preparing a delicious meal for dinner. This little experiment might be a real eye-opener for him.

And don’t forget that he also needs your acknowledgement about his contributions. Let him know that he is a good man, a fantastic father, and an excellent provider. A little known secret to ensuring healthy family relationships is to learn to catch someone doing something right and let her/him know. It’s a simple way to express love and appreciation.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.