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They want to talk, but are they listening?

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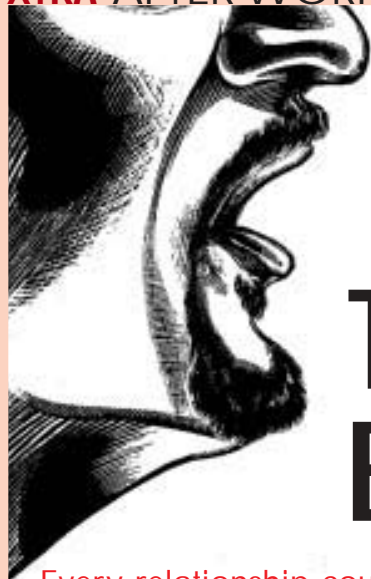
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XTRA AFTER-WORK BLUES



THEY WANT TO TALK, BUT ARE THEY LISTENING?

MCT

Every relationship could use a little less action, a little more conversation

DR MANOJ THULASIDAS

AFTER a long day at work, you want to rest your exhausted mind, and maybe gloat about your little victories or whine about your little setbacks of the day.

The ideal victim for this mental catharsis will likely be your spouse. But the spouse, in today's double-income families, also suffers a tired mind by the end of the day.

The conversation between two tired minds usually lacks an essential ingredient — the listener. And a conversation without a listener is not much of a conversation at all. It is merely two monologues that will end up generating one more setback to whine about: Spousal indifference.

Indifference is no small matter. It is the opposite of love, if we are to believe novelist and Holocaust survivor Elie

Wiesel. So, we have to guard against indifference if we want to have a shot at happiness, for a loveless life is seldom a happy one.

"Where got time?" ask we Singaporeans, too busy to even form a complete sentence.

Ah ... time! At the heart of all our worldly worries. We only have 24 hours in a day before tomorrow comes charging in, erasing all our noble intentions for the day. And another cycle begins, another unstoppable revolution of the big wheel turns and the rat race goes on.

And the trouble with the rat race is even if you win, you are still a rat!

So, how do we break this vicious cycle?

We can start by listening rather than talking.

Listening is not as easy as it sounds. We usually listen with a whole bunch of mental filters, constantly judging and processing everything we hear. We label incoming statements as important, useful, trivial, pathetic and so on.

And we store them away with appropriate weights in our tired brain, ignoring the crucial fact that the speaker's labels may not do justice the message.

Because of this potential mislabelling, what may be the most important victory

JUST DO IT

WE MAY ASK: 'WHERE GOT TIME?' WELL, LET'S MAKE TIME, OR MAKE THE BEST OF WHAT LITTLE TIME WE HAVE.

or heartache of the day for your partner may accidentally get dragged and dropped into your mind's recycling bin.

Avoid this unintentional cruelty; turn off your filters and listen with your heart. As Wesley Snipes advises Woody Harrelson in *White Men Can't Jump*: Listen

to her (or him).

It pays to practise an unbiased and unconditional listening style. It harmonises your priorities with those of your spouse and pulls you away from the abyss of spousal apathy.

But there is no such thing as a free lunch. It takes years of practice to develop the proper listening technique, and continued patience and deliberate effort to apply it.

"Where got time?", you may ask. Well, let's make time, or make the best of what little time we have. Otherwise, when days add up to months and years, we may look back and wonder: Where is the life we lost in living?

*The writer is a scientist from the European Organization for Nuclear Research and also heads OCBC's Quantitative Analytics team. His internationally-acclaimed book, *The Unreal Universe*, is available in bookstores and at www.TheUnrealUniverse.com*