

Phil Stutzman

PSYCH-502

Spring, 2013

Less Nagging, More Bragging

Sarah and I were working through “a rough point” in our relationship. After a few long discussions on whether to break up, we attempted to work through our issues.

The most upsetting issue was her frequent complaining about my behavior. For example, she would tell me I don’t listen to her, I don’t give her enough attention, I play too many video games, and that I should say what I mean. I didn’t understand why she continued to be with me if she was so unhappy with my behavior. She would often nag too much and in return, I would often raise my voice and say, “Stop nagging, all you ever do is complain about me.”

Foolishly, I figured that if I told her that her nagging was obnoxious, it would cease. But it didn’t and after months of conflict neither of us was happy with the relationship. Because raising my voice had not worked, I decided to use other basic behavior modification techniques.

I started prompting and reinforcing alternative behaviors to reduce the nagging. I told her, “I wish you would complement me more.” From then on, contingent upon her complementing me, I reinforced her behavior immediately by kissing, hugging, or complementing her.

I was not sure why she nagged so often, but I guess my responses to her nagging may have provided reinforcement. Perhaps it was because when she nagged, I would attend to her and talk about our relationship. So, I decided I would not punish nagging by raising my voice or complaining about her, but rather reduce nagging by ignoring it.

Ignoring proved difficult as she was clearly audible and sometimes insulting while nagging, yet I still did not respond. After briefly ignoring her nagging, I would either ask her, “How would you like me to behave?” or change the subject entirely. Of course, my attending to her nagging might reinforce her nagging.

The benefits of this procedure were soon apparent. Almost immediately her nagging decreased and her complementing increased more than ever before. I was satisfied receiving more complements and she was more satisfied with the relationship. She was more satisfied as the procedure resulted in me becoming a more affectionate and attentive boyfriend. What is even better, what had started as a procedure to modify one aspect of our relationship had come to enhance many other facets of the relationship.