

Setting the Tone

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As a marriage therapist, I have spent the last 25 years listening to men and women talk about their relationships.

Overwhelmingly, women tell me their number one issue is **TRUST**.

Obviously, women lose trust when their man tells lies. But it goes beyond that. They feel unsafe when their man won't keep his word and won't follow through. They get tired of not knowing what is going on inside their man's head. They hate being forced to make all of the decisions. They resent their man's passivity and passive-aggressiveness.

Women lose trust when their man won't set the tone and take the lead. All too often, a woman has to take over the man's job by default because the guy won't do it. When a woman takes the lead, the guy assumes she must want to be in charge. Even though she doesn't, once she has gotten behind the wheel, she won't let go until she is convinced she can trust her man to take over and drive.

Women want to feel safe more than anything else. They naturally look to men for security (it starts with daddy and continues into adulthood in their intimate relationships with men). If they can't trust the man in their life to make them feel safe, they are forced into taking charge.

When a man fails to lead and set the tone, the woman feels unsafe, loses trust in the man, loses sexual desire for him, has to escalate testing behavior, and has to become controlling (not a pretty sight).

When a man forces the woman to set the tone and take the lead, he becomes frustrated, resentful, emotionally unavailable, manipulative, passive-aggressive, and moody (also not a pretty sight).

I know the concept of leading and following seems almost old fashioned in our "modern" society. Yet someone has to set the tone. No matter how much you hear about equality and 50/50 relationships, they still make cars with only one steering wheel and televisions with only one remote. When it all comes down to it, someone has to lead.

It never ceases to amaze me that when I address the issue of men building trust with women by setting the tone and taking the lead, the women always nod in agreement. I have yet to have one single

woman interrupt me and say, "Excuse me, but I would rather set the tone and take the lead in our relationship."

When I talk about setting the tone and taking the lead, I'm not about talking about men being controlling, manipulative, selfish, making every decision, or having everything go their way. I'm talking about a man deciding what he wants and inviting a woman to join him. If the man leads, the woman has a choice to follow or not. He isn't forcing her to do anything. But she doesn't have a choice if he doesn't clearly lead or let her know what direction he is going.

A woman can't follow where a man doesn't lead!

When a man sets the tone and takes the lead, it actually opens the door for a reciprocal relationship with a woman. Masculine leadership makes "give and take" possible. When a man is passive, it prevents any kind of shared decision making.

It doesn't matter if you are a single guy looking for love or a married man in a committed relationship, the principles remain the same.

Have a plan, don't force her to make all the decisions. Tell her what you want to do, she can always offer a counter plan. Give her something to respond to. Asking her what she wants to do or giving her too many options is not the way to make a woman happy.

Tell your woman what you are thinking, what you are feeling, and what you want. Don't make her guess or read your mind. Don't wait for her to bring up problems in the relationship, it's not her job and will make her feel like a nag. If there is something in your head, let her in on it. Don't let resentment fester and build inside you until you blow up or lash out in passive-aggressive ways. Deal with things NOW!

Always treat a woman with love and respect. Don't keep secrets. Always tell the truth. Don't do anything behind your woman's back. Always do what you say you are going to do. Don't procrastinate. Finish what you start.

A few months ago I was sitting in the bar of a local restaurant with some men who had taken one of my dating classes. An attractive waitress I know walked by our table. I said "Jessica, come here, I want to ask you a question." I asked, "How do you like it when the guy you are dating leaves all the decisions up to you and repeatedly asks you what you want to do?" Without hesitation, Jessica emphatically

retorted, **"IT IRRITATES ME!"** I thanked her for her candid response and turned back to the guys and smiled.

Want to make a woman happy? Set the tone, take the lead. Be a man your woman can trust!