

HOW TO
Talk
SO YOUR
husband
WILL
Listen

rick johnson

SPIRE

Rick Johnson, How To Talk So Your Husband Will Listen
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Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Spire edition published 2016
ISBN 978-0-8007-2655-3

Previously published under the title *The Man Whisperer*

Printed in the United States of America

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The Library of Congress has cataloged the original edition as follows:
Johnson, Rick, 1956–

The man whisperer : speaking your man's language to bring out his best
/ Rick Johnson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8007-3197-7 (pbk.)

1. Marriage—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Man-woman relationships—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Communication in marriage. 4. Communication—Sex differences. 5. Husbands—Psychology.

I. Title.

BV835.J64 2008

248.8'435—dc22

2007052711

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16 17 18 19 20 21 22 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Dedicated to my lovely
(and influential) bride,
Suzanne.

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Acknowledgments

I'd like to acknowledge all the great women out there who helped me with this book by giving me insight into the mysterious, complicated, and sometimes scary minds of the female gender—you know who you are.

I would also like to give a big thanks to Becky Johnson for her inspiration and key insights for this book.

The influence of applied femininity is, by any measure, incredibly determinative. In every culture, in every age, the power is awesome. And dangerous. As with any significant reservoir of power it may be used for good or ill. Its impact may be constructive or destructive. Like a mighty river, it is a force that may turn the turbines and generate power that will light up a community, a home, and a man's whole life. But undisciplined and unchecked, it may devastate, demoralize, and utterly destroy.

Some women have no clue how much actual power they hold, and those are the women who destroy their husbands by default. Other women are acutely aware of their power and make a conscious decision to become high controllers. But still other women, keenly aware of the power God has vested in their femininity, make a deliberate choice to use that power only for good.

Stu Weber, *Four Pillars of a Man's Heart*

1



A Woman's Whisper

A woman can so easily crush a man's spirit. With a look. With a word. With a shrug of indifference. . . . Her cynicism is utterly emasculating, and many times, incredibly subtle. Like a fine, thin blade it slices deep, penetrating to the very core of his masculine soul.

Stu Weber, *Four Pillars of a Man's Heart*

What is the difference between a traditional “horse trainer” and a “horse whisperer”? The difference is that a whisperer gets a PhD in the animal, studies the animal, and communicates in the animal's language rather than trying to get the animal to become more like a person.

The trainer simply demands the horse comply and fit into his world. In essence the trainer creates an obedient, castrated, brow-beaten pet. Some men married a long while to ultra-controlling women can relate to these geldings. Stallions are often castrated

to make them more gentle and compliant. But it takes away their fire and passion for life and leadership. Stallions, not geldings, lead herds. Just like men, not geldings, lead families. (I know, mares actually lead the herd, but I'm taking liberty to make a point here.)

Some women have been forced to be leaders in their homes either through being a single mom or by living with a passive, apathetic man. But other women have wrested the mantle of leadership away from their men and clung to it tenaciously like a prized trophy. Either way it tends to castrate masculinity. And castrated masculinity is never healthy masculinity.

The horse whisperer, however, quietly observes and listens, and notes, and then gently enters the animal's world to make contact that is full of trust, rather than fear. The horse whisperer is compassionate, wise, and tender, yet firm. The result? An animal who trusts the whisperer, because the whisperer respects the animal. They form a pleasant, mutually giving relationship, and the horse and rider are both better for it.

The old song "Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Man?" from *My Fair Lady* can be turned around to say, "Why Can't My Man Be More Like a Woman?"—which is subconsciously what many women are asking. It is the wrong question. The right question is, "How can I get a PhD in my man, so that I know how to encourage him to be his personal best self?"

Nearly every woman I talk to in connection with our Better Dads ministry eventually asks me some variation of the same question, "How can I change my man?" Generally it's phrased something like, "My husband is driving me crazy with [you fill in the blank]. How can I get him to stop?" In fact, the most frequent complaint men have about women is that women are always trying to change them. (The most frequent complaint women have about men is that men don't listen.) Unfortunately, the real question isn't *how*

can a woman change a man but *can* a woman change a man? The answer from every man I ask this question to is, in a word . . . no.

On the surface it might appear that a woman can change a man. My uncle was a man fraught with demons of drink and deed for much of his youth, spending a significant amount of his adult life in prison. Upon meeting his wife he turned his life around and lived the second half as a respectable and peaceful man. It appears that she changed him. But I suspect the reality is that she gave him a reason to change himself. She's long since passed on now, but when I asked him about it, he said, "It finally boiled down to having a greater reason to stay sober than to raise Cain. That woman was good for my soul."

I think what women really mean when they say they want to change men is that they genuinely want to know how they can positively influence their man to help him be the best man he can possibly be. Perhaps I'm giving some women the benefit of the doubt, but let's proceed under the assumption that you have your husband's or boyfriend's best interests at heart. After all, you chose him like he is . . . you couldn't have possibly made that big of a mistake, could you?

While you may not be able to change a man, you certainly have the God-given ability to influence and motivate your man in ways that border on the miraculous. *In fact, your capacity to influence your man is one of the most potent forces on earth.* But to be truly effective you must understand how and why your influence works.

A woman can be like a trainer or a whisperer with a man. She can either try to bend him and change him to her will, or she can use her talents and skills to learn about him and help influence him through trust and love to be all he was meant to be.

Gary, a listener to Dr. Laura Schlessinger's program, made this comment: "A husband is like a horse. At the end of the day he is

usually rode hard and put away sweaty. If his master drives and beats him, he'll go just so far before bucking and rebelling. [But] if you love him, if you coax him, he'll drive himself till his heart explodes before he will let his master down. He'll give himself to death for the one he loves. Which way should a woman handle a man?"¹

When a man loves a woman, he will do almost anything she asks. Men have climbed mountains, swum oceans, and conquered armies all for the love of a woman. Delilah caused the downfall of the strongest man on earth, and Helen of Troy with her "face that launched a thousand ships" was the center of a ten-year war between nations.

Single women often lament that all the good men are already taken. Is this true? Maybe. But, just maybe all those men they admire who are taken are good, in part, because of the positive influence of their wives and girlfriends in their lives.

Women have an incredible influence in men's lives. The old saying "Behind every good man is a good woman" is not just hyperbole; it is the truth.

A Woman's Influence

A man's wife has more power over him than the state has.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Can a woman "change" a man? Perhaps, but probably not in the sense some women may hope. And if you do succeed in "changing" him, it will probably have negative consequences. We've all seen the henpecked husband who does whatever his wife tells him to. He is an empty shell of a man. He's not happy and neither is she.

But a woman can use her powerful influence to subtly guide and lift a man up to be all he was created for. She holds the key to his success or failure as a man, husband, and father. This influence is delicate, understated, and nurturing as opposed to a male's bolder, more overt influence. It tantalizes a man with heady inspiration and inspires him to believe in himself that he possesses greatness. Her subtle, refined grace arouses within him a passion which emboldens his character and deeds.

The Percy Sledge song "When a Man Loves a Woman" talks about the extremes a man will go to for a woman's love—everything from turning his back on his best friend to sleeping out in the rain if his woman asks him.

That love he has for you gives you great power. Do you use that power for superficial gains or as a long-term investment in both your futures?

Most men won't change or grow on their own without some external motivation. But that love for you can motivate them to mighty changes. As Jack Nicholson says to Helen Hunt in the movie *As Good as It Gets*, "You make me want to be a better man."

In an equestrian competition called *dressage*, a skilled rider sits apparently motionless in the saddle as the horse performs an intricate series of movements, remaining relaxed, their performance appearing effortless. The goal of a horse and rider in dressage is to move as one—each knowing and anticipating the other's desires.

To some degree this is how a woman should approach her man—to encourage him to do something without anyone else seeing you do it. I don't believe that constitutes manipulating or controlling him. He wants to make you happy; he just doesn't know how. Your willingness to use your influence to gently steer him in the right direction makes both of you happy and more satisfied.

The Importance of Your Respect

Men today are confused about what their roles are and how best to live their lives. We get mixed messages from the media, the educational system, churches, and even the government. We don't know what's expected of us, and so we often hide rather than face rejection or failure. One thing that's been determined very clearly from workplace studies is that if employees don't know what is required, they cannot fulfill those expectations. They are also not very happy or satisfied with their situation.

A man's role used to be pretty clearly defined as a provider and protector of his family. While these roles are still fundamental, things have gotten much more complicated regarding relationships. Most women do not leave their husband because he is a poor provider; they leave because he does not fulfill her emotional needs.

I confess that I firmly believe women possess "women's intuition," but I also just as strongly believe that men do not. Your man really needs your help to understand your needs because he will not be able to meet them if he doesn't know what they are. Many women, consciously or unconsciously think, *Well, if he really loved me, he would know what my needs are.* Unfortunately, that is the way women think, not men. Sometimes, women are not even in touch with what they need; they just know they need something. It is unfair for you to expect him to be able to read your mind, or to understand your needs especially if you don't. *Your man has no mental framework to understand what your emotional needs are because he does not think the same way you do.*

I also believe that most men truly want to satisfy their women in all areas. They secretly yearn to reach their full potential and become worthy of admiration and respect from other men and especially

their woman. A man garners his self-esteem from whether or not he can satisfy his woman. Your influence and whether or not he can satisfy your needs can make or break him as he goes through life.

Men want to understand women, but it seems like a monumental task. This reminds me of the story about the guy walking down a California beach. He looks down and sees a lamp sticking out of the sand. He picks it up, looks at it, and starts brushing the sand off from it. Suddenly in a puff of smoke, a genie appears! The genie says to the man, "I will grant any one wish you want."

The man exclaims, "Great! I've always wanted to go to Hawaii, but I'm scared to fly and I get seasick. Build me a bridge across the ocean so I can drive to Hawaii."

The genie says, "Do you have any idea how complicated and difficult that would be? The logistics alone make it impossible. It would cost billions of dollars. Isn't there anything else you'd like instead?"

The man says, "Well, I've always wanted to understand women."

The genie replies, "Do you want that bridge two lanes or four?"

While many men struggle understanding their wives, you are more important in his life than he may ever know. As a woman, you were designed by God to be your man's helpmate (Gen. 2:18), although the term "completer" might be a more accurate description of a woman's role with her man. A woman completes a man in ways he could never accomplish on his own. Of course any time God gives us this kind of responsibility, he also equips us to be able to perform it. Therefore, you have a unique opportunity to use this powerful influence that God gave you to help your man achieve his destiny. Make no mistake about it. God gave you a hugely powerful influence, which we will talk about throughout this book. But like any great power, you have to learn how to use it properly and respect the damage it can cause.

Power for Good

As a woman you can build a man up or tear him down merely by the level of respect you give to him and the amount of faith you have in him. Your tongue wields greater power than any double-edged sword.

I'm not sure if my wife began giving me respect and admiration before I started acting like a real man, or if the respect came after my actions. However, it's my perception that her offering respect and admiration (even if I didn't necessarily deserve it) was a major contributor to my changing from a complacent, self-centered man, husband, and father into an active, motivated man interested in lifting others up to help them reach their potential.

I do know that she taught me what love was. I grew up in an emotionally dangerous and often physically violent world. I did not know how to love. My wife's patient example and teaching helped me to heal wounds that I didn't even know existed. Once I started to heal, I was more able and willing to fulfill her needs and desires. Without her nurturing nature and loving spirit, I do not know if I would have ever healed to the point of being able to truly enjoy life or love another person, much less myself. Needless to say, she has influenced my life tremendously. And because I influence many people through my work, she has contributed to the touching of many other lives as well. All because she used her feminine influence with her man the way God designed.

It takes much more work and effort to build something than it does to destroy it. Like either a skilled craftsman or a demolition contractor, a woman is capable of building up or tearing down her man. That's a big responsibility and a power that many women do not recognize. Some women, such as femme fatales, use their power for destruction and self-gain. Other women do not use it

at all and become victimized. The best circumstance is where a woman understands her power and uses it responsibly to benefit her life and those of her entire family.

Many men have been brought to salvation because of their desire to be close to a cute young gal. And many a man, myself included, has gotten a new lease on life due to the love of a good woman.

A woman has incredible power. She can destroy her man with her words or she can help him become the man he could never be without her support, faith, and encouragement. There's not much a man can't deal with in life if he knows he can come home to a loving, supportive wife who respects him.

I made a couple of assumptions while writing this book. One is that the reader is already in a relationship with a man. Some of you may be still looking for a good man, but that is another book sitting on my desk just waiting to be published. The other assumption is that you are in a relationship with a reasonably good man. Maybe he isn't perfect, but at his core he's a good man with the potential to be better. You would like to know how best you can help him be the best man he can be. For those of you in relationships with bums, losers, abusers, addicts, or just plain bad men, you may need more help than this book can offer.

Much of this book is directed to help a woman understand how to fulfill a man's life and help him become more than he would be without her. A man also has a duty to help meet his woman's needs, but that too is another book.

This book will focus on how a woman can become indispensable to her man and will explore the ways a woman can use the incredible power God gave her to influence her man so that he becomes the kind of man he was created to be. We will look at everything

you need to know (and some things you might not want to know) about your influence as a woman. We will examine what makes a good man and what character traits hold him back. We'll look at the power God gave you as a woman—both inspiring and destructive—and how it impacts a man's life. You'll learn the greatest strategies to empower him and the tactics most destructive to his soul.

When we are done, you will have the ability and insight to help shape, encourage, and inspire your man to greatness. You will hold in your hands the key to being . . . a Man Whisperer!