

Ep. 156 – Seek First To Understand



WITH JEFF WILSON & DOREEN YAFFA

Jeff 00:00

Hello, everybody out there. Today we're gonna be talking about seeking first to understand your spouse, and then be understood. So if you're ready for Episode 156, let's get started.

Doreen 00:25

Are you ready to create a life that's better than ever before? We are Doreen Yaffa and Jeff Wilson and we are here to give you the strategies you need to create the life after divorce that you deserve, and desire. As partners, both in marriage and coaching. We use our expertise as well as our own personal experiences to help you make the next chapter of your life, the best chapter.

Doreen 00:57

Hey, Jeff, how are you?

Jeff 00:59

Hey Doreen, how are you?

Doreen 01:00

I'm doing great. I'm doing great. Yeah,

Jeff 01:02

Yeah, what's new?

Doreen 01:03

Well, we're leaving in a few days to go on a vacation.

Jeff 01:07

Yes. I'm so excited to go to Italy and France.

Doreen 01:10

Yes, it's gonna be great. I am doing some work while I'm there. So for those of you that need to know, I do have time carved out for all that to address, you know, my cases and all that.

Jeff 01:23

I guess that's what we do. Yeah, from anywhere. Exactly.

Jeff 01:28

Yeah, I don't know if it's the anticipation or just make the anticipation of making sure you had everything planned out properly.

Doreen 01:28

We can work from anywhere. So we're excited about that. It's always nerve racking when you're going away, isn't it when you're on vacation getting ready and packed and all that kind of good stuff?

Doreen 01:44

Planned and the packing? And like, Should I bring this? Should I not bring this?

Jeff 01:48

You know, leaving your life behind?

Doreen 01:50

You're like, yeah, well, you're leaving your place. You know, as is and the babies, the babies. We have two dogs at my oldest, our oldest daughter, Amanda is going to be here, taking care of them while we're away. So I don't know how that's gonna go. I think it'll be fine. I think it'll be fine. I mean, they are certainly spoiled, aren't they?

Jeff 02:11

Are we worried about the dogs? Are we worried about Amanda?

Doreen 02:13

I think we're worried about both. But they'll be fine. So everything will be good.

Jeff 02:19

Yes, it will be.

Doreen 02:20

All right.

Jeff 02:21

So let's talk about it when we get back.

Doreen 02:23

Yeah. So what do you want to talk about?

Jeff 02:25

One of my favorite books has always been the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, by Steve Dr. Stephen Covey.

Doreen 02:33

Yeah, I think it's a must read for everybody.

Jeff 02:36

And we're gonna be focusing on habit #5 today, which is seek first to understand, then be understood. It's the habit of empathetic communication.

Doreen 02:48

Oh, my goodness, but it's so hard to do?

Jeff 02:50

Well, you know, we've been talking a lot lately about communication and divorce. And why? Because I'll go out on a limb and say that it's probably one of the most popular reasons divorce happens is the lack of communication.

Doreen 03:04

Yeah, popular. That was an interesting word popular, one of the most popular reasons divorce happens, meaning that a lot of times when you ask people why they're getting divorced, they'll just tell you a breakdown in communication. But I think that, you know, breakdown communication is just like a fallback. I think that's part of it. You know, people just don't, they don't know how to communicate, most people don't know how to communicate. So I think we want to focus in today on how the benefits of understanding and seeking how to first to first understand how it can help you in your divorce, specifically, and I want to gear it a little bit towards settling your case. It does take mind control, thought control, because you first have to understand what it looks like, which we're going to explain today. But then you have to actually apply it. And I think what happens is people want to get through divorce so quickly. And they don't and they want to avoid conflict. They want to avoid the unpleasant, right, but divorce is unpleasant. They're getting through it right.

Jeff 04:17

It's almost like an oxymoron. If you slow down it will happen faster.

Doreen 04:22

Exactly. Well, that's what I was trying to say thank you.

Jeff 04:25

You're welcome.

Doreen 04:26

So seeking first to understand your soon to be ex and their perspective and where they're coming from is the key to settling your case. Ultimately, it is also the key to a better relationship if you have children together, moving forward. So again, it is not this is not easy. And for me, in particular, if I have challenges with this seeking first to understand, because I'm like what do you mean you don't understand when I'm talking about like, this is easy,

like, whatever it is that I'm dealing with, like, here it is. Here's the issue. Here's what is it more is there to understand like, there's my understanding of it. And I'm like, shouldn't everybody understand it this way? But the reality is no. So as we're going through this, this episode, I hope to, to learn something more from Jeff. But we came to this episode, because we were watching a news news station, we were probably making dinner or somebody had the news on, and I can't even remember who it was, I wish I would have wrote the name. But there were two politicians, and they had their faces up, you know, side by side. And they were interviewing them. And they had very different opinions on whatever the topic was, which I do not remember. But the one guy said, what?

Jeff 05:49

Well, you basically said, you don't have to agree with someone to understand where they're coming from.

Doreen 05:57

Well, what he said was, I thought it was a little more like I seek first, because they had to ask the question, what do you think about blank about what the other side had said? And he said something like, I, I seek first to understand the the reason, and why they hold a particular understanding or thought or position, not that I necessarily agree with that position. But I try to understand why they have it. Right, like, this is their position. And I thought, this is beautiful. Like, it was so nice to hear that first of all, in today's political environment, right.

Jeff 06:41

Yeah. I mean, if you're like most people, you probably seek first to be understood, correct. And get your point across. And in doing so you may ignore the other person completely. So it's kind of like pretending that you're listening selectively, and then waiting to get your point in edgewise.

Doreen 07:04

Yeah, I mean, how many of us when we're actually in a conversation, or listening to what the person is actually saying, as opposed to thinking about what we're going to say in response? I think it would be a good idea to try on for size, really listening? And then how the person or why the person has a position or, or a thought that they do? I think it is clear that human nature, we want to be understood, we want to we want to be, you know, we want people to say yes, I get what you're saying, oh, data validated. That's the word I was looking for. I said, I'm sorry. So there's reasons why this is important. Do you want to touch on those?

Jeff 08:00

Experts teach us that there's four main benefits to listening and understanding people first. We gain true insight to how our spouse really thinks. That's valuable information that will often clear up some certain misconceptions that we have about our spouse. Especially going through the divorce.

Doreen 08:27

So say that one again, I'm trying to digest it.

Jeff 08:30

Gain insight, you gain insight to what they're thinking. Gain insight to the way they think, or and when you do that, then you can look back at your thoughts and say, well, I had a misconception. I thought the wrong way, because I misunderstood what they were saying.

Doreen 08:48

Oh, so clarity, I'm really clarity. I'm really, really..

Jeff 08:52

Talking about..

Doreen 08:53

Make sure you understand what they're talking about.

Jeff 08:55

Right? And then it helps you to check what you thought you were having. Wow, I thought something totally different. Now that I have, now that I listen, and I understand it's totally different.

Doreen 09:07

Right. So do you just ask the person? Could I understand more about your, your thoughts on this? Where's this coming from?

Jeff 09:18

That's a great question to ask. I'm not quite understanding where you're coming from. Could you please explain a little bit further what you meant. Okay.

Doreen 09:27

That's the first thing.

Jeff 09:28

Yes. Second, our actions will show the other person that we value their opinion.

Doreen 09:36

I think that's important.

Jeff 09:38

And what they believe.

Doreen 09:39

Because if we ask somebody, could we please understand more about why you have this position? Why you want this, whatever it is, or don't want this, okay?

Jeff 09:49

No, it doesn't mean that we agree with them. It doesn't mean that we agree with them. It just shows that we're making an effort to emphasize with them and understand where they're coming from

Doreen 10:00

Understood, so it gives the person validation, right? It usually will change the tenor the tone of the conversation. I think that when you know, I'm looking at this is let's just take an example here, you're talking to your ex, or soon to be ex about, let's just pick something. How about, we're going to be starting school in August, right? So let's say, what school the kids are going to go to next year, and maybe you've moved, and there's two different options

or whatever. And that's a big decision, right? And your ex thinks it should be one school, you think it should be a different school? Okay, that's a big decision. So seek first to understand, you might ask something like, what?

Jeff 10:44

Well, why do you prefer this school over the other school?

Doreen 10:48

Would you mind articulating for me before we talk more, the reasons why you prefer this school over whichever other school like? And listen, when you're asking these questions, you don't want to ask these questions and try to pursue this type of a conversation. If you're in the middle of a heated argument, or it's a little, you know, uppity you want to, to maybe suggest first, you know, what, I think this is a really important subject, I would really like for us to have some time to dive into this. Let's schedule a time or let's meet for coffee or however it's going to be to really think about this. And, you know, converse about this when we're both out in a good place, if the conversation is not going well, if the conversation is going well keep going. Right? So that was the first and

Jeff 11:45

come up with legitimate reasons and research. That's going to give you fuel for why you want to choose that school. It's not because it's just what I want. And that's the way it is.

Doreen 11:58

And I hate to say it, but a lot of times at least what I see is that when one person wants something, even if the person doesn't want the same thing, they'll just argue with them for the sake of she wants it so I'm not going to agree to it. Please don't go there. You know, and if your ex is doing that, it only takes a conversation like this seeking first to understand to start to change that ongoing. Battle back and forth.

Jeff 12:26

Trying to be understood first.

Doreen 12:28

Correct. So the first thing again, was what?

Jeff 12:30

Was to understand..

Doreen 12:32

Ask the question.

Jeff 12:33

Yeah, as to question, gain insight.

Doreen 12:35

Could you explain to me like the reasons why in our example,

Jeff 12:39

So you have clarity.

Jeff 12:41

Want the child to go to this school?

Jeff 12:43

Right. And the other, the second benefit is that you understand what they believe and how they feel. And again, you may not may not agree with them.

Doreen 12:54

Or it could be the actual facts behind their reasons. Feel, but then you can start to really analyze better your own position.

Jeff 13:05

And this is a kind of a good one. The third one is it puts you in a position of synergy. Because whether you agree or not, you're working together to find out what school your child is going to go to.

Doreen 13:20

I would suggest also that when you're doing this, she might want to relay some common understandings that you both share. For example, if you're talking about this example, I might say if I'm the wife, right, and I'm talking to the husband, I might say something, you know, I really am trying to understand better why you prefer this school over the one I would I suggest, could you give me some, you know, is now a good time to talk about that? Or should we schedule a time that's more convenient? Because I'd really like to understand all the reasons. And, you know, not that I'm agreeing or not at this point. I'm not, but I just want to understand them. That's first. The second thing is maybe to articulate, I might say we both share the same goal. We want our son to be at the best school possible for him this coming school year, right? And of course, the person is going to say, yes, right. So you've our ticket you're asking for to understand you're not putting them on the spot right there. You're asking if it's okay to discuss it now. And you're letting them know we have a common goal. Let's agree on that, that we want our son to be in the best school possible for him.

Jeff 14:40

Yeah. Puts me in a position again, of working with you versus against you. And it kind of drives the position of working on a resolution.

Doreen 14:51

Correct. What's the next one?

Jeff 14:52

The next one is once we've made the effort and demonstrate our understanding. It naturally leads to the the person making the effort to do the same thing.

Doreen 15:03

Right. So it could be a natural progression. We're now in, in our example, my, you know, pretend husband says to me, Well, I'd also like to know your reasons. So yeah, maybe what we should do is meet for coffee, put our reasons together and come together and really think of this.

Jeff 15:27

It kind of opens doors.

Doreen 15:29

it does. Any other ones, you had four.

Jeff 15:31

That fourth one was, you know, what's going to happen is they're going to do the same thing that you're doing. So if you're opening up your mind opening up your door to possibilities, they tend to do the same thing. And it kind of breaks the, brings the walls down so to speak.

Doreen 15:52

Correct. True, true. All right. So what next?

Jeff 15:57

Okay, so what happens is, when you're both on a common goal?

Doreen 16:02

Well, when you can first articulate that you both have that common goal,

Jeff 16:05

Exactly, then what you could do is you can figure out what result you want. Okay, so let's say the result is having that productive conversation leading to the finalization of what school the kid is going to go to. Then, and member in the model that we teach, talks about thoughts, leading to, you know, feelings, actions, actions, results. So now we're going, we're gonna reverse engineer, we've got our result that we want, right? Now you can see what kind of actions we have to take, to get the results, we're going to kind of like write down all of your benefits of your school, look at the benefits of my school, and kind of weigh them out and see which one we think is the best school for our kid, right? And that feeling that you're going to have is, hey, we've accomplished something, we did something together, and that this listening stuff is beneficial. And we're coming up with something great for our kid.

Doreen 17:01

Well, I think it's important also to go with an open mind and maybe keep a neutral thought process to consider in our example, the other school, right?

Jeff 17:11

Exactly.

Doreen 17:12

And then, you know, look, you may not have a person on the other side that wants to play nice in the sandbox. But if you don't try this type of an approach, which is seeking first to understand and trying to get into communication modes, especially when it comes to children, because you're going to be dealing with each other as coparents after the divorce. You know, you certainly are doomed from the onset. You know, this is just another one of those pieces of advice that we're trying to put to give you, to help you to really give you the best chance of a better life, have a better way of settling your case have a better way of working with your co parents, right. I was just thinking as you were talking about each of these, if we did this, and mediations from the onset, and we went into a mediation, saying to the other side in advance, right? Listen, I know we have different thoughts, different goals, different ideas on how this case should settle. And you could even take the issues and dissect them, right? You want the house, I want the house, you know, you you say you're going to

pay X amount of child support, I say it should be why like you know, all the different things. But if you say to your soon to be exes, and my goal is to really understand where you're coming from, and the thoughts behind them so that I can open my mind up to having a meaningful mediation.

Jeff 18:42

It teaches you that your viewpoint isn't the only one out there. When other people have different opinions, other people have different views. And when you open up your mind to listen and comprehend them, you might just have an aha moment that well, that is a good idea. Or maybe that is a better way of doing things. And my view as good as it may have been. This view is better.

Doreen 19:06

Well, I think it's important also to realize, do you really have that viewpoint? Or are you doing it because your your ex wants it? Like, how many times have I been in a case where that is going on meaning? You know, we can't settle the case over some silly issue who's going to get the chair that happened to me once there was a chair I'll never forget that. But it was a very expensive like this, you know, antique chair and there was one in the world and it was like everybody wanted it. It was so crazy. And I thought it's a chair. Yes, it's a valuable nature, but come on, we eventually resolved it. Do you really you know what can you give in on to? Because settling your case resolving issues is all about give and take. You know maybe if in our example, you know you can concede on the issue of the schooling? Because it really now you understand? Yeah, you know what both schools are good. There are some valid points there. There'll be more concessions on other things that maybe you do hold a stronger position on.

Jeff 20:15

Well, it's not that who won and who lost, it's a child isn't the winner.

Doreen 20:20

But isn't that true with even if there aren't children, you're trying to resolve your case, there are no winners in divorce. You might prevail on a particular issue. But that doesn't mean you won the overall case, look, there, there are many issues in a divorce that have to be decided. So if you give on one they give on another where we say a mediated a resolution in a case through a mediation or a settlement, it feels for the client, as if they gave too much and took too little. But that feels the same way on both sides. Nobody comes away going who I won. You know, there are cases where that happens on high levels, but they're rare. That's not for most people. So what else on this issue? I think it's a very interesting issue. I'm gonna try it myself. Because I think what you're teaching here, Jeff, today, and you brought this subject to the table, thank you so much, it's a really good subject. I'm going to try to do that, in my own practice. My own business world, when I'm dealing with team and I'm dealing with conflicts with, you know, whatever it looks like with the other side, I can do this with the lawyers, I can say, look, I hear your position on this. But I really need to understand why you're holding this position.

Jeff 21:36

I think I love the habit, of course, habit five in the book. But I was reminded of it by the politician that we saw on TV, yeah, and how it affected you. And you really was like, you were really impressed by and love. So I'm like, you know what, that's something that we should share with our listeners. Because the bottom line is when you slow down, and really

pay attention and listen, in any situation, you'll realize how much you've been missing during your conversations.

Doreen 22:11

100%. We should try this ourselves.

Jeff 22:14

I'm listening.

Doreen 22:16

But are you seeking to understand yes. Yeah, I also wanted to say that one of the good, I think a tip here is if you are going to look if it's a big issue, like schooling, like we just gave as an example. I think it's better to try to do these conversations, where you have a set time to meet, okay, and if you can do them in person, please try to do them in person and be ready, like you said, be prepared. Now that it's like, Oh, I'm gonna be prepared and show them all the reasons also them all the reasons why the school is the best school yet no, like, have your facts behind it.

Jeff 22:51

I know another thing that really helps in a conversation is after I have listened to what you said, and I say I understand exactly what you're saying. And thank you for bringing your point to me.

Doreen 23:03

I think exactly a strong word.

Jeff 23:05

I understand what you're saying, or Yeah, I understand what you're saying. And instead of saying, but which councils everything you just said that's what they say. You say, however, which builds a bridge. These are these are my points as well. So if you thank the person for bringing their point to you, or I trying to understand what you're saying, and I thank you for telling me that it's it's definitely building a bridge in a relationship when it comes to conversations.

Doreen 23:36

Yeah, and like in our coparent example, you're going to be co parenting with this person for forever.

Jeff 23:44

And by the way, this works incredibly. With children. When you're listening to your children, and I'm the parent, I'm the dad.

Doreen 23:55

Because I told you so.

Jeff 23:59

Do as I said, not as I do. It really, really works that I you know, I'm really listening to you. And I understand what you're saying.

Doreen 24:08

I know that when you had the conversation with Dr. Is it Rocco? Yes. That that was part he seeks first to understand when his daughter was wanted something he asked her all the reasons why like, why do you want this right?

Jeff 24:24

He was the man, the master at it.

Doreen 24:27

I mean, it's it's really teaching great skills. But also another tidbit of advice would be if you are going to meet in person meet in a neutral location, right, because it just makes people feel more comfortable to be, you know, in somewhere that is just neutral ground.

Jeff 24:43

Absolutely.

Doreen 24:43

Yeah. What else?

Jeff 24:45

That's it.

Doreen 24:46

Oh, okay. I think that's great.

Jeff 24:48

I'm gonna hope anybody has any questions about understanding and listening and seeking first to understand what your ex spouse or your current spouse is saying I would love to talk to you about it. Please, look, go to lad-coaching.com and schedule a call with me. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. .

Doreen 25:11

Absolutely All right. Have an amazing week. Bye bye.

Jeff 25:23

You have the vision of what you want your life to look like after divorce, but maybe you just don't know how to get there. So if you're ready to take control of your life and want to find out more about our coaching, visit us at lad-coaching.com. That's LAD as in lad-coaching.com.

Doreen 25:45

Until next time, have an amazing rest of your day. And remember, yes, you can have an amazing life after divorce.