

love + life

Hey— He May Have a Point!

When men spout unsolicited advice—as they're prone to do—you might want to reach for the mute button. But consider this: Hearing him out could actually bring you closer.

By Faye Brennan

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*"Uh-oh,
here it
comes."*

STEP 1
Help Him Help You

You were late to work, totally bombed an important meeting, and spilled coffee on your dress—all before lunch. What you want is to vent about how truly crappy your day was without having to hear “You should really ditch those giant coffee mugs, babe.”

On the other hand, if your best friend is giving you the cold shoulder out of the blue, you may want your guy’s opinion on what her problem is.

It’s helpful to know the difference between those two desires—simple venting versus seeking guidance—and to recognize which one you’re looking for before you start unloading on him. And more important, if you know what you’re after, then you can communicate it to him.

“There’s an assumption that, if my partner loves me and we have a good relationship, he or she will know how to respond—and that’s just not true,” says Lawrence.

In reality, when you start huffing about a dilemma, “men often just don’t know what to do,” says David Posen, M.D., author of *Always Change a Losing Game: Winning Strategies for Work, Home, and Health*. “They’re usually in fix-it mode, thinking in a logical, problem-solving way—so emotional nuances may go right past them.”

Your plan: Once you have his undivided attention, say, “I’m really upset about something, and I just want to vent for a few minutes and not have you say anything.” Or, “I’d like to know how

As a close couple, you probably share a lot of things—the occasional bag of chips, a *Game of Thrones* obsession, and on really good days, the shower!

But there’s one thing you probably don’t willingly accept when your man offers it: his advice. A series of studies done by the University of Iowa surveyed couples over the first seven years of marriage and found that the more husbands and wives gave each other unwanted advice, the less satisfied they were with their relationship in general.

Unsolicited input was one of the worst offenses, breeding frustration, anger, and overall marital misery over time, according to study author Erika Lawrence, Ph.D., an associate professor of psychology at the University of Iowa.

Rather than giving in to cranky annoyance, why not do something shocking, like letting him help? Start by following this three-step guide to placing more value on his two cents.



really **LISTEN**

We can all use a little refresher on how to pay attention when someone’s talking to us. The next time your guy starts blabbing—whether it’s about his idiot coworker or a serious problem with a family member—follow these tips from David Posen, M.D., to stay tuned in:

- 1**
BE IN THE MOMENT
Avoid cracking a joke or changing the subject. If he’s been talking for awhile and you want clarity, just say, “What I’m hearing you say is...” This way, you can add to the convo, and he can clear up any gray areas.
- 2**
MAKE SURE IT’S THE RIGHT TIME
If you’re making dinner and your guy wants to talk, you may miss parts of what he says. “Ask if he can wait so you can give him your attention,” says Posen.
- 3**
DON’T RUSH IN WITH YOUR OPINION
Before you launch into what you think, make sure he wants to hear it. Ask, “Do you want my feedback?” If he says yes, offer your advice. If he says no, just tell him that you’re happy he told you about it.
- 4**
KEEP YOUR EYES ON HIM
Maintaining eye contact signals that you’re focused on what he’s saying. “Don’t look out the window,” says Posen, “and definitely not at your electronics.”

you would handle this situation.” With this preface, your partner will clearly get what’s expected of him up front, says Posen, and it’s more likely you’ll receive the support you crave.

STEP 2
Make Room for Natural Instincts

Even if you make your wishes known, your guy may not be able to resist the urge to chime in with his own suggestions. “Most men suffer from performance anxiety about everything,” says Mark Goulston, M.D., author of *Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely*

To stop yourself from shutting him down immediately, try to appreciate his motive. “If you know that when a man offers advice it’s his way of being helpful and supportive, then you’re more likely to hear it that way,” explains psychotherapist Ashley Davis Bush, L.C.S.W., coauthor of *75 Habits for a Happy Marriage: Marriage Advice to Recharge and Reconnect Every Day*.

So the next time he’s being “helpful” about the faster way to get home, try to respond with curiosity (or at least neutrality) instead of defensiveness. Acknowledge his input with a simple “That’s an option” or “That’s interesting” (even if what you really want to say is “Who asked you?!”). If you actually hear and consider what he thinks, sometimes you may even be surprised to find that you agree with it.

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Anyone. “So when you’re sharing something that has you emotionally upset or charged, he’s feeling pressure to help you by finding a solution.”

But instead of helping, those efforts often strike every anger chord in your body. Here’s why: “There’s an implication that we aren’t able to figure out what to do on our own—that we have to be taken care of, or told what to do,” says Lawrence. Plus, if he’s offering advice on a topic he’s not an expert in (say, he tells you which route to take when you call to say you’ve hit traffic on the way home from work), then his suggestions are even more likely to irritate you, according to a study in *Marketing Science*.

STEP 3
Take It or Leave It

Whether you decide to use your man’s advice or not, it’s important to give him some credit for trying to help, says Bush. And when he’s followed your lead and just listened to you vent without butting in, he deserves an extra nod—or a fierce hug.

Other than that, there’s no need to rehash what was said. If you’re not taking his advice, you don’t have to explain why in point-by-point detail. Instead, if his suggestions didn’t feel right to you (or his input was superfluous), simply walk away with the idea that he was trying to be there for you in his own way. “In the end, we’re our own best tuning forks to determine, yes, this could work, or no, this doesn’t feel right to me,” says Bush. But you already knew that, didn’t you? ■