

A. Shaunti's Case Study Cheat Sheet

Hi guys... as Jeff noted in the introduction to the case studies, please use this section sparingly and only once you've *already* wrestled with the questions! I know it might be tough at first to try to put yourself inside the head of your wife or girlfriend and answer the case study questions without this aid. But *if you will resist the temptation to read this section first*, I believe you will notice a marked increase in your skill level at "reading her mind."

Chapter 2 – "So I'm just your maid now...?"

Women sometimes come to the end of their rope like anyone else. And in this case, her cutting, exaggerated remark is a red flashing signal of what she has probably been feeling like, inside. It seems to Blake to have come from nowhere, but most women are not irrational and therefore it did come from somewhere. The hurt behind it needs to be investigated and taken seriously even if the accusation itself is exaggerated and does not. By feeling "like the maid," she's probably feeling that Blake takes her for granted, which by definition means she thinks he doesn't appreciate all she does as an exhausted mother who has been managing two demanding children and the household virtually without help so that Blake can get his own demanding business off the ground. Her remark means that even though Blake has cut back on business hours, she hasn't perceived him as increasing either his home help or affirmation as much as she'd expected.

Blake needs to fight the understandable temptation to rehearse his own exhaustion and taken-for-granted feelings and instead pursue his wife and resolve something that has clearly been building up inside for a long time. The *last* thing he should do is "go away."

If Nicole is upset enough to retreat to the bedroom and close the door on him, it will mean *that much more* if Blake pursues her, goes into the bedroom, sits down with her on the bed, and pulls her close in a big hug. She needs – and wants – to hear him say something like, “I’m so sorry that I haven’t noticed how overwhelmed you’ve been feeling. I love you and appreciate you so much.” (Jeff says that this pursuit of a woman who doesn’t want to seem to want be pursued might seem very counterintuitive to you as a guy. But trust me, unless there is already a larger relationship-destroying crisis going on, most women will melt at an action like this one. Her response to you is likely to be its own incentive system to try it again.)

Chapter 3 – “...the criticism I keep getting from your mother.”

Nicole’s mother-in-law is critical of her, and those hurtful comments lodge in her head. Every time she feels overwhelmed with two rambunctious pre-schoolers and a messy house, her mother-in-law’s last little comment replays over and over again as if on a feedback loop: “This is such a stressful time for Blake, my dear, and he really needs a peaceful haven at home, and, well, I don’t think that’s what he has right now.” Even though Nicole avoids Blake’s mom, the damage has been done. To undo the damage and help her close the window, Blake can do several things:

A. When Nicole is stressed that the house is a wreck, even if she *doesn’t* bring it up, it would be nice for Blake to realize that she may be hearing Mom’s voice in her head and actively counteract that voice by affirming her.

B. Avoid the temptation to tell her to ‘let it go.’ Nicole has been hurt, and she should be able to count on her husband to care about that hurt and work to heal it and prevent it recurring, instead of seeming to say its unimportant.

C. To prevent recurrence, there are several options long-term. If Nicole has been struggling with whether she should say anything to his mother, he can encourage her in that. But even better, he can offer to talk to his mom directly, defend his wife to her and ask her to stop the snide remarks. That will make Nicole feel protected and loved. His action would not only (hopefully) solve the problem, but the love it shows would also further counteract any residual effects of the hurtful comments themselves.

Chapter 4: Lots of hours away, but new baby, new minivan... and money doesn't grow on trees.

Nicole can appreciate Blake as a provider and enjoy the new house and minivan... and still not feel like those things are her main desire. Nicole has always most needed his closeness and time with her, but she was willing to set that priority aside temporarily out of love for Blake and a desire to see him succeed. But after years, she doesn't see any sign that he *wants* to cut back. And that begins to feed the concern (that she was able to squash earlier), about whether he really cares about her and the kids, or whether he secretly enjoys his job more.

Unlike what Blake might be thinking, she's not willing to permanently trade off their time together to get the financial success. While she is certainly delighted with the financial increase; it's not her *primary* goal. Her expectation all along was that she would trade off their time together for a while – in order to get him back later once he'd

built the foundation of his business. So if she doesn't get him back, she feels like she traded off all that time and sacrifice, without the end result she'd been expecting.

She's also not particularly aware of the stress that Blake is feeling to provide for all these new responsibilities because as their expenses have grown, it looks to her like the business would support their new lifestyle even if Blake transferred some of his "excess" hours to another staff member. But she's a rational person and if Blake disagrees, it would be helpful for her to see the numbers the way he does. Especially since she might want to pursue ways to cut back those numbers and give him the freedom to be home more, such as buying an older minivan with much lower payments. She also wants him to be happy and fulfilled in his job, and that makes her happy. But she believes that if he really loves her, that he'd be willing to find a better balance.

Chapter 5: He's watching the playoffs, she's concerned about their toddler

For weeks, Nicole has felt like her heart would break at the sight of her little boy grasping and crying out "don't leave me mommy," and then weeping inconsolably when she walks out the Sunday School door. Each time, she stands outside the room and listens to him sobbing, and feels tears prickling her own eyes. She wonders if she's making him feel insecure by walking away, if she's being selfish at not keeping him with her in church – which usually means missing half of the service. Shouldn't she be willing to miss church if it makes her son feel more secure?

In short, she feels like a bad mom, and after the fifth week in a row where Ethan melts down in Sunday School, her emotions are raw. Soon after church, she goes looking for Blake, to have someone to download all her concerns to, and get them off her chest. And frankly, down deep, she really just needs reassurance that she's a good mom who loves her son and that he'll be okay.

Blake, however, can't seem to even take his eyes off the football game long enough to acknowledge how upset she is. And when Blake bypasses the main concern about whether she's a bad mom who is making her son insecure, and focuses on the surface issue – how to get him to stop crying – she feels like he's just trying to brush her off and go for the 'quick fix' so he can get back to his game. Which makes her feel like he cares more about his game than he does for her.

When she says 'never mind,' she's saying that out of anger, but in her mind it is also giving him one last chance to demonstrate that he *does* care by choosing to turn down the football game, shift his focus, and help her process this significant worry, and be reassured. (And after she's felt like he understands her worry and the depth of her concern, if there *is* a logistical 'fix' that might help the situation, she'll be much more willing and able to hear it.)

In all honesty, unless she's a sports fan herself (in which case she probably wouldn't have tried to talk about this during a playoff game to begin with), she truly doesn't understand how important the game probably is to Blake. She doesn't realize that he is thinking that

this problem with Ethan will still be there in two hours, but the game won't be. Because of this likely lack of understanding on her part, there is almost no way around her being somewhat hurt if Blake does ask her to wait and talk about it in a few hours. *However*, that hurt can be minimized to some extent if he will invest two minutes in turning all his attention to her, looking into her eyes, and saying right up front that he understands how much this must be concerning her right now, but that he's finding it hard to concentrate because the concern will still be there in two hours but the game won't – and ask her permission to come back to it after the game. That way, at least she will feel like she is being taken seriously, even if there is some hurt at being put off for a while.

Chapter 6: She overpowers him on the sofa....

Almost everything Blake did in the week leading up to the “surprise” evening said: “We’re in this life together and I love and value you.” And each of those things made her feel very close to him, especially the household projects where he came home early so they could spend several concentrated hours together and have a chance to talk and catch up on life.

But sex probably never occurred to Nicole during most of that time. For a woman who has “receptive desire,” feeling close doesn't necessarily mean she would have thought about sex. But when she got his cute, suggestive little email: *that* made her think about sex! And she began to anticipate having quite an adventure that evening! And it never

would have occurred to her to be defensive, because Blake had built a context of closeness ... and because he was so darn cute and lighthearted about it.

Realize also, though, that she still may not *initiate* it... but that once her mental engine is on that track, that she's just as "ready" as he is.

Chapter 7: "I wish I could be beautiful for you again."

Nicole doesn't feel very good about herself. She really does not like the way she looks; either for herself or for Blake. She really wishes she looked like she did before kids, and is intensely surprised at how difficult it is, now, to lose the weight. And working that hard seems pretty exhausting with all the other things she has on her plate, so its easy to justify letting it slip. But she still doesn't like herself very much, and deeply needs affirmation from her husband.

Despite her comments, she also doesn't quite realize that her effort (or lack thereof) really does matter to Blake, emotionally. She thinks he should love her regardless, and doesn't understand that he can both love her *and* be wistful about wishing she'd make a bit more effort.

However, because she's unhappy with how she looks, she instinctively feels his unhappiness, too. She tries to hide, to cover up, and apologize, and – in truth -- deeply wishes he would say, "It doesn't bother me, honey." That would free her to not worry

about it. But since that would not be true for most men, instead, it would be valuable for her to hear the same things Blake said at the end of the case study: that he still found her exciting – even if she didn't look like a model on TV – got lost in her eyes, adored her and wanted to be with her. And instead of “letting her off the hook,” those affirmations would help relieve the angst every woman feels in the face of the cruel comparisons on TV.

He could also say (very carefully), “If you want to work on this area, what can I do to help you?” And calmly answer, “You rock my world regardless, but yes, of course I want us *both* to stay in shape for each other. I think we'd both feel better about ourselves.”

Just so you know, men, just as you don't get “hints” from her about some things, most women are not going to get “hints” from you that, for example, your joining a gym has anything to do with your wish that she would lose weight. Instead, women need to learn some specific information that they (believe it or not) may not know: that it is emotionally important to you to know that she is willing to make the effort to take care of herself for you. One tool may be to encourage her to read *For Women Only*, which has a chapter (Chapter 8) on this specific topic. It is encouraging for women to know that you do *not* expect or want her to look like the models on television, just that her *effort* makes the difference.