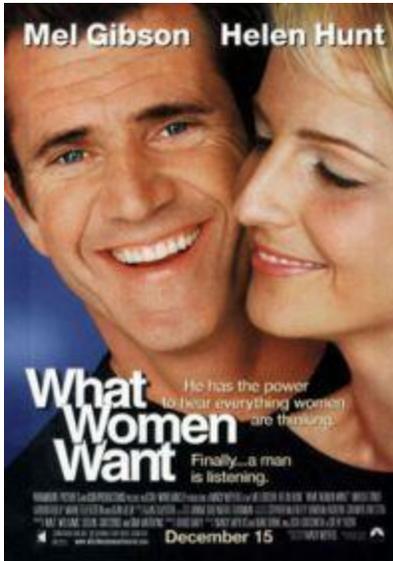


# *What Women Want:* An Analysis of Communication Skills



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*What Women Want*, a movie released in 2000 by Paramount stars Mel Gibson as Nick Marshal and Helen Hunt as Darcy McGuire. Nick works as an advertising executive at the advertising agency Sloane-Curtis. He is an “alpha male” (Wikipedia, *What Women Want*, screen 1), which causes men to follow him and women to want him. In the opening lines of the movie, Nick is described as “a man’s man” (*What Women Want* (2000), time stamp 01:02). After getting passed up for a promotion to become the creative director, Nick becomes upset. Darcy, described as “a real man-eater” (*What Women Want* (2000), time stamp 11:51) is brought in from outside the company to be the creative director for the firm for many reasons, but mainly because she is a woman. One night, a strange accident occurs in which Nick is given the ability to hear the thoughts of females. Nick is first upset and troubled by this ability, then uses it to his advantage, and finally, starts to feel guilty about using this ability to his own advantage. In the end, he loses the ability to hear the thoughts of the women around him. The over all theme of the movie could be summed up as a true battle of the sexes. In the context of this film, there are several types of interpersonal communications portrayed, including clichés, paraphrasing, and the ethics of communications.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines a cliché as “a trite or overused expression or idea”. It would be hard to give a complete account of all the clichés portrayed in this film, but many do stand out. In the beginning of the movie Nick Marshal wore dark colored clothes, representing how he was a bad guy who used women. Throughout the movie, as he started caring about the women around him, he starts dressing in lighter colored clothes, representing how he was starting to become a good person (The Directions Commentary of *What Women Want* (2000), also, Wikipedia, *What Women Want*, screen 4). In the beginning of the movie, Nick, while channel surfing, would quickly flip the channel past cooking shows and other stereo-

typical women shows and would settle on sports and other stereo-typical male shows. Later in the movie, he started watching the cooking shows, including Martha Stewart, and would skip over the sports shows. He was starting to think like a woman! When Nick went to the office the first time after the accident, a woman looked at him while she was eating a rice cake and thinks “Oh, yeah, like you’ve got the perfect body?” (*What Women Want* (2000), time stamp 33:16).

While Nick didn’t appear to have any reaction to the comment, later in the movie, he started to eat rice cakes. This is because Nick had started to think as well as act like a woman.

Stereotypically, in American culture, women worry about their weight, especially when someone else makes a comment on their figure. Early in the movie, Nick, in the midst of a mental breakdown after hearing all the thoughts of the women around him, visits Dr. JM Perkins, played by Bette Midler, a therapist who he had used in the past. He was able to convince her that he can hear the thoughts of the women around him, after which she tells him “If Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus, and you can speak Venusian, the world is yours to conquer.” (*What Women Want* (2000), time stamp 49:43 – 49:47). When trying to compare the differences between men and women, the line that “Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus” has become such a cliché that it has basically lost all meaning, and has become a throw-away line.

The use of paraphrasing is helpful in restating what someone has told you. Morgan Farwall, played by Mark Feuerstein, who is both a friend and co-worker of Nick, seemed to paraphrase Nick several times in the movie. Early in the movie, Nick tells Morgan that a co-worker thinks that he (Morgan) is over paid and gay. Later in the movie, we see Morgan asking this co-worker if she said that he was overpaid. She laughed and said no. Then he asked if she said he was gay. She looks shocked, and swore that she never said that. (time stamp 51:30 – 51:45) Another humorous example of Morgan paraphrasing Nick was early in the movie when

Nick first tells him of his ability to hear the thoughts of women. To quote from *What Women Want* (2000) (time stamp 36:29 – 36:41):

Nick: “I hear what they're all thinking. It's driving me crazy. Even French poodles, I can hear them.”

Morgan: “So we're on the same page, I need you to know you sound insane. You freaked out over losing the job, which I understand. But if you tell anybody you can hear the thoughts of a French poodle...”.

In addition to Morgan Farwall, there is a lot of paraphrasing found in this movie. Since Nick can hear the thoughts of the women around them, he would paraphrase their thoughts out loud. One example of this is found in the brainstorming session that Darcy held shortly after starting her new job, seen in time stamp 38:38 – 40:06 in *What Women Want* (2000). Sue Cranston, played by Ana Gasteyer, had the thought that taking Advil was a good way to fake a headache when she didn't want to be intimate with her husband. Nick thought her idea sounded like a great idea and stood up and tried to present this as an idea for an ad campaign for Advil. He paraphrased Sue's thoughts, yet the women of the group hated the idea and, when confronted, Sue herself said she had never used an Advil for this purpose before. In addition, Nick used the practice of hearing Darcy's thoughts and then paraphrasing them as his ideas for ad campaigns quite a bit in the movie. For example, their boss comes in and asks their thoughts on a storyboard. Darcy starts to think that it would look better in black and white and that it was too parochial. However, before she is able to say anything, Nick jumps in and tells the boss essentially what Darcy had just thought. (time stamp 56:04 – 56:45). Later, Nick brings her an ad that he's been working on. She looks at it and likes it, but thinks it needs more work. Nick, reading her mind, paraphrases

her mental suggestions, passing them off as his own (time stamp 1:07:50 – 1:10:25), leaving her to wonder “Did he come up with that, or did I?” (*What Women Want* (2000) time stamp 1:10:27).

The final point of communications evident in the movie is ethics in communication. Towards the end of the movie, Lola, played by Marisa Tomei, waits for Nick outside of his apartment. Earlier in the movie, he found out from her thoughts that she has been hurt a lot in relationships. He uses this information to get her to go on a date with him and they have a one night stand. (time stamp 50:37 – 51:26 and 1:00:45 – 1:03:56). Afterwards, he never called her nor did he stop by the coffee shop she works at. So, after 6-days of waiting, she comes and waits for him for several hours to get home. She asks Nick if he was gay. While waiting for his response, she thinks “Say you're gay. Then I'm not nuts. I'm not undesirable. Not rejected by another guy! Say it! Say you're gay! Admit it!” (*What Women Want* (2000), time stamp 1:29:43 – 1:29:46). Since Nick had the ability to hear her thoughts, he knew that if he told her that he was in fact gay, she wouldn't be hurt by him. He faced an internal ethical debate. Tell her the truth and crush her because he used and hurt her, or lie and spare her feelings. He decided the best course of action was to lie to her and spare her feelings. In another instance towards the end of the movie, Erin (the file girl), played by Judy Greer, didn't show up to work. Nick, having heard her suicidal thoughts earlier in the week while at work, decides to go to her house and try to stop her from hurting herself. He loses the ability to hear women's thoughts right before he gets to talk to her. After a few missteps, he tells her that he got a vibe from her that she was going to hurt herself (time stamp 1:47:15 - 1:47:56). This really upset her and she starts to cry saying that it isn't good that he could tell. After seeing her upset and hearing her cry, he adds that the main reason he was there was to offer her a job as a copywriter, something that she had previously applied for and was denied (time stamp 1:48:04 - 1:48:58). This cheered her up. But,

of course, that isn't what he went there for. So, he lied to her to make her feel better about herself.

Good communication skills are necessary in story telling. So it is with the movie *What Women Want*. Without the movie's use of clichés, for example, the storyline wouldn't have been as funny, as it would have been harder for the audience to relate to some of the battle of the sexes humor applied throughout the movie. Without paraphrasing, some of the harder concepts may have avoided being as thoroughly understood. And, without the ethical dilemmas Nick faced, his growth would have been limited in the movie. Would *What Women Want* have been entertaining without these? Most likely, but together, they made a good movie a really great one.

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