**Exploratory essay - Why Do Women Expect Men to Know What They Want?**

Generally, guys don’t have reputations as thoughtful gift givers.  This is especially true for me, which is problematic since my wife, like many women, expects gifts on the traditional occasions but prefers to keep me clueless about what she wants.  Her birthday is this weekend.  Christmas is the following weekend.  Since I’m challenged in the arts of gift planning, purchasing, wrapping, and giving, I’m just now starting to think about what I should probably get her, but between now and the weekend I’ll probably spend most of my limited spare time wondering why, after 12 years of marriage, she still expects me to be a mind reader and then expresses disappointment when she realizes I’m not.  Does she want jewelry?  Sandals?  A Copper Chef pan?  A Squatty Potty?  Seriously, I have no clue.  In addition to not being a mind reader, I don’t expect gifts, so if someone feels compelled to give me one, I don’t get disappointed if it’s something lame since I had no expectations in the first place, which makes it difficult for me to see where she’s coming from.  I’m not the only guy I know in this situation, which begs the question “Why do women expect men to know what they want?”  It’s risky territory to explore, but I have a few theories.

 My first idea is that some women simply enjoy seeing their partners aimlessly flail about in utter cluelessness.  As my wife flipped through channels a while back, she paused on *America’s Funniest Home Videos,* a show I despise, and I remember watching a video of a dog seeing itself in a mirror, barking defensively, and then retreating until it could no longer see the threat.  Then, it peaked around the corner, saw the mysterious intruder, and went on the defense all over again.  It repeated this cycle yet again, and the studio audience cracked up.  Isn't the definition of insanity doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results?  And every time I try to flat out ask my wife, sometimes even politely, if she could just tell me what she’d like for her birthday so I could buy it and move on with my life, I know she’ll refuse to comply … but I still do it, over and over, just like the poor dog in the video.  Is it possible that, upon witnessing my cluelessness, my wife is cracking up at my expense?  Definitely.

Theory number two: guys always do things that aggravate women - we often commit thoughtless and heinous offenses like leaving a toilet seat up, drinking milk out straight out of the container, or uncorking an explosive belch at a fancy restaurant - so perhaps aggravating a dude by refusing to help make his life easier for him amidst a high-stakes situation is a form of payback.

It seems to me that most women aren’t short on complaints about their boyfriends or husbands.  Gathering at any kind of social event, they actually seem to enjoy trash talking their clearly inferior halves.  So if a woman wanted a Squatty Potty, and her special dude friend wrapped up a Copper Chef pan instead, despite having good intentions, he’s just given her the gift of having yet another reason to complain about him.  During her next ladies’ night out, she can say something like, “OMG, Marcy, you won’t believe Johnny’s latest epic fail!  Can you believe he actually thought I wanted one of those lame *As Seen on TV* Copper Chef pans?!  Who does he think I am - his personal cook?  Doesn’t he realize it’s not the 50s anymore?  What a moron!” Is it possible having another complaint in her arsenal is actually what she wanted all along?  Heck, I don’t know.

Most likely, though, women probably expect men to know what they want for far less sinister reasons.  When a guy succeeds in giving a woman a gift she truly cherishes - perhaps a dozen roses with a sappy card or a set of earrings she offhandedly pointed out during a shopping trip several months before - she might see it as a sign that he’s been paying attention to the little things throughout the year.  Wouldn’t that show that he listens?  That he cares?  That he understands her?  That he knows how to make her happy and wants to do so?  Most likely.  But one thing I know for sure is that now I feel like a chump.  Perhaps I’ll spend the rest of the week reflecting back on the little things I might have missed this year.  It just might help me think of the perfect gift for my special lady friend.