



## Advice for the Home Team Toolbox by Dr. Debi Warner

Dear Dr. Debi,

*I am like everyone else I think. I like to grab a beer and head to my shop, alone. I get along with my partner and have a few. We just can't do any projects together and occasionally fight about the situation of the house. So, if we are doing this well, how come we don't settle the house issues?*

Signed, Average Joe

Dear Almost Average,

It sounds like you have many aspects of your home life brewing just fine. But in the places you are striving for better, it slips out of reach. Each of you can live in your own world OK, but actively engaging in the overlap brings the challenge. So let's see what might improve things.

If the alcohol you drink is a small amount, it likely does not impinge on your faculties and coordination. But most toolmakers would recommend not operating machinery with a beer in you. That said, let's move on.

I imagine you tinker just fine alone in your shop. You make things, sharpen tools, repair windows, and maybe even put things away. The world of the shop is a comfy place that can be homey like a kid's clubhouse. I love it. Yet you are alone in there. The world rotates around you; your thoughts are the road map; no one challenges you to explain yourself; you can change subjects and not have to track where you are headed in thought. The flow in your head can be pleasant, or at least not tangled.

When you interact with your partner and try to work out a situation, it takes explanations and listening and all sorts of skills like that. Most times, we are able to handle listening, but if we get too far into our heads, then venturing out to explain or listen becomes a burden. And, guess what? Alcohol, even a little, makes that skill harder to do. You don't have to have much to have that effect, the bubble effect.

Have you ever gotten water in your ear when swimming? It is hard to hear people and you get pre-occupied with the sensation of fuzziness and try to get it out. Well, alcohol does something similar to us emotionally, but we tend not to be concerned over it. Alcohol dulls our sense of other people's needs, what they are saying, their points, and their questions. If we are missing that much of the conversation and we have a problem to

solve together, we will really miss the solution.

A conversation with your Home Team needs to have several phases, including the first, where each of the team members can have their perspective, questions, and needs understood. You can imagine how this phase is compromised when the subtle impairment of alcohol dulls our awareness of other's points of view, when we are in our bubble. You don't even have to be drunk at all, for this effect to occur. Consider that you want to use the right tool for the job, have it sharp, and use it carefully. Your brain and conversation skills are the tools you use to solve the situational problems. If you water down those tools, you may miss the job completely.

Thankfully, people are forgiving, or at least they try to be. You can try again, and next time, use your sharp tools to listen and take your time going through the phases of conversation that lead to resolution. After listening to all team members' perspectives, you take a break and consider all the points of view present on your team. Keeping your head clear for this thinking phase will let it sink in. You can go to the shop again and organize the wrenches. You can tinker with the kid's bike that needs repair. Just not with a beer, and your good brain will turn over the things you heard and start solving the puzzle of how they can all fit together.

Later, you can get back together with your Home Team and discuss the possibilities you mulled over in your smart brain. This part of the conversation is problem solving. Many possible solutions may be posed and everyone tries to feature how they could work out. It is not a possessive time of getting your way. It is like looking at a catalogue of possibilities and seeing which ones might fit your situation. Again, you need a sharp mind that is not tied to your own answers, or you will try to bully your way through it and get no resolution. So, no beer here either. Just keep that mind open to other's points of view and you will find more progress in resolution.

This whole business of keeping your mind sharp and polishing the tools of listening and openness to other's points of view is a subtle skill in your renovations. Alcohol can clean the tools but not your brain. There is a time and a place for each purpose, so with more information about this process, you can now know when to use that solvent effectively, and what to keep it off of. May you find that your brain is more ready to listen and bring about solutions that work for the whole team.

Happy Home Team!

*Dr. Debi*

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*Dr. Debi Warner is the Founder of Renovation Psychology® radio host, and author of the book, Putting the Home Team to Work, available now online at RenovationPsychology.com. Dr. Debi provides advice for greater domestic harmony to folks who are renovating their home – for True Home Improvement. This column is offered for enjoyment and enhancement and is not intended to replace your personal medical care. Photo by Bob Jenks, St. Johnsbury, Vt.*

*Dr. Debi has a consultation practice, from her studio in Littleton, NH, with house calls all over the East coast.*

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