

Karen Telleen-Lawton: What's So Funny? A Venus-Mars Experiment

Cartoon elicits surprising responses, and, maybe not so surprisingly, not everyone gets the joke

By Karen Telleen-Lawton, Noozhawk Columnist | Published on 05.07.2012 6:42 p.m.



Sometimes what's sustainable is a good laugh. Recently I guffawed at a [New Yorker](#) cartoon and slipped it onto my husband's dresser. Close your eyes and I'll describe it to you.

So the wife, in a nice ensemble of dress and jewelry, stands in the foreground adjusting doo-dads on a little side table by the front door. Behind her in the center of the drawing is a sofa, on top of which is her purse. At the top of the frame, the husband has entered the room adjusting his tie. He says, "I'm ready to go whenever you're finished fussing with tablescapes."

My husband glanced at it and shrugged; it didn't do anything for him. "I guess it's the word tablescapes," he offered. "The guy invented a new word." He's usually a lot quicker than I am. I suddenly realized it was one of those Venus-Mars things. I folded the page in half to expose just the cartoon and some partial columns of text, then scanned and emailed it to my family for a "scientific" survey.

My daughter understood it, even though she's been married for only a year and a half. Her husband didn't. But the survey disintegrated from there. My sister emailed me back, "Can't wait to read — can you resend with the bottom section showing, it's folded over," to which I responded, "Just the cartoon, not the article. Don't go blond on me!" She shot back, "Oh. Oops. I went blond many moons ago!" When we settled that matter, she understood the cartoon, but by this time it was a bit anticlimactic.

Likewise my folks. My Dad does most of their electronic communication because Mom doesn't like to be online. But he took a pass on this email. "Marge, you do this one," he demanded. I got the following email in return.

“I think (and Dad says, ‘Whatever you say!’) it happens a lot here — I’m ready but Daddy is reading, just to wait patiently for me. So I’m not rushing him, he’s not rushing me, and we’re both waiting for each other!!! Not all that funny but that’s my solution.” In other words, Dad didn’t get it and passed it to Mom, who found it too annoyingly true to be humorous.

My son is usually insightful, and very caring toward the women in his life. I thought, if any male would get it, he would. When I read his response, I could tell he was trying very hard to decipher the meaning:

“I’m not sure I fully get it. ... Man is annoyed he has to wait for wife while she adjusts one of several overdecorated surfaces in the living room, which he refers to, slightly unusually, as ‘tablescapes.’ Are you guys sensing some ambiguity in whether she is cleaning up, perhaps after husband, rather than just rearranging? Her delicate hold on the mini-jar makes me think the latter. ... What am I missing?”

I asked him to have his girlfriend explain it to him. But she said, “It’s about the man making fun of his wife for rearranging stuff on a little table that is not urgent or important, but she’s doing it anyway even though they gotta go somewhere. It’s mostly making fun of women, right?”

So I guess my Venus-Mars experiment was a failure. Maybe the cartoon isn’t all that funny. But at least now I know my son’s girlfriend isn’t living with him, or surely she would have gotten the joke.

— *Karen Telleen-Lawton’s column is a mélange of observations spanning sustainability from the environment to finance, economics and justice issues. She is a fee-only financial advisor (www.DecisivePath.com) and a freelance writer (www.CanyonVoices.com).*