

How to Stay Married!

The 'Happily Ever After' starts now

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After 20 years of marriage I think I may have it figured out. On June 29, 1996 I thought I was committing to a person, but the truth is I committed to a process called 'being married'.

The big question on the day of the wedding is usually "will everything go well and will the food arrive hot?" Rarely is the question be "how will the marriage be after the big day...?" I had no idea, no matter what anyone told me, that I was in for the ride of my life. That ride started the next day, June 30, 1996...

Even with all the work and details involved, getting married is easy; staying married is not so easy. As the divorce rate hits 50% in North America it seems that more and more people are taking what seems to be the easy way out of a situation that, on the day they said "I do", was never even a thought. Now that statistic is brought up more and more as a fact of life going into this important day.

Divorce is rarely easy, so is there anything that we can do before the nuptials to at least give the marriage a fighting chance??

So, how does one stay married after the magic of the romance and honeymoon period are over? Here are 7 things that may help newly engaged couples navigate the journey into the unknown.

Begin with the end in mind! Decide how you want your married life to be, look and feel. Discuss with your partner the day-to-day expectations you have about what you think marriage is and how you would like to create your life. Pre-marital courses are great as they allow you to bring up your thoughts, goals and dreams with in the safety of a facilitated program. Do this as soon as you are engaged. Bring up all your goals, fears, hopes and dreams. Be brave!! Put it all out there so your partner knows who they are really getting. If you are with the right person, the truth is what will bring you closer. It is easier to stick to something long term if you know what you are getting into in advance.

Take a truthful look at the marriage of your partner's parents.

Whether we know it or like it or not, we are products of our environments. Look at all the positive and negative aspects of each others upbringing and decide which qualities you want to bring into your own married life. When your new wife 'becomes her mother' don't be surprised. It happens, especially when children are involved.

Commit to the process of 'being married', do not commit to the other person. If you are only committed to the 'person' as he or she is on the

wedding day, then, when they grow and change...which they will, they may no longer be the person you married.

Irreconcilable differences is the legal term for, "I don't know her/him anymore". People change and grow. We learn, we unlearn, we make mistakes and we can hurt each other with unsaid or unmet expectations. If you go into the marriage and understand that this person also becomes your business partner in life, make sure that you listen deeply to their goals and do not make up a story about who you want them to be. If you are committed to being married, each of you can grow and change with the support of the other. Marriage is a process; it is not the end game.

Ensure you are fully disclosing yourself. This one is the hardest. For example, if you are bringing years of debt from years of schooling (or a shoe addiction) it is much easier to deal with this type of thing before you get married than to have to deal with it afterwards. We have the fantasy that if he/she loves us enough they will forgive us. Maybe so, but wouldn't it be better for the marriage if the disclosure of 'negatives' happened prior to a lifetime commitment. This way a choice can be made with all the information.

Know that just when you think you have it figured out, IT will all change. Life happens. Sickness, health, death, birth, moving, job loss, menopause, weight gain, hair loss... If there is a chance that anyone of these things will happen to you, then have a plan to stick it out together. Be a team, a loss of a job or a birth of a child happens to both of you now.

There is no WE! Even though it seems society is created for couples, newly weds need to understand that a couple is still made up of a 'you' and a 'me'! When you say WE should do something, make sure you assign one of you to actually DO IT. If 'WE' doesn't get it done, then the blame game begins. This is one of the biggest traps I have found. If I hear my husband say, WE should get groceries, I now know to ask if that means he is stopping at the store, or should I. If I don't ask for clarification, generally WE end up both at home with nothing in the fridge. It goes both ways. Saying 'WE' is a cover for not having the courage to ask for what you want. It becomes a habit to say would YOU do this please?

Don't be afraid to negotiate. Your life partner is someone YOU have chosen. Sometime there are business conversations you must have. Emotions can run high so if a decision needs to be made on a sensitive topic like religion, children, money or politics, treat each other with the respect you want to be treated with. Take turns listening to each other without trying to figure out how to be right or get your own way! Also, if you find yourself in a battle of wills or arguing over things in the past, just remember, you decided that this person...and you need to get this...is the person YOU chose to spend the rest of your life with. You are still the boss of your own life and have chosen a partnership with another person who is still the boss of their own life. Your marriage is a third entity that needs to be honored and protected.

If you have entered this mature agreement called marriage with as much honesty and integrity that you have, don't be afraid to speak your mind, give a little and love a lot!

On June 28th, the night before my wedding, I asked myself a hard question before I fell asleep. As I closed my eyes I said "If this person NEVER changes...can I commit the rest of my life to MY MARRIAGE to him?" When I woke the morning of my big day in the safety of my parent's home the answer came to me loud and clear. It was "Absolutely, be a grown up, get your own needs met and take care of yourself" It was only then I truly understood that I was creating the next stage of my life, with a man I loved and respected, exactly for who he was.

Gratefully 2 years ago we are entering our third decade of our marriage partnership and I plan to stick it out to the end. We have both changed, grown, gained and lost weight, lost hair and even a tooth or two. There have been good times and great times. The bad times, well they exist too. I am blessed that I know that if the bad times didn't exist we really would not know how good we have it.