The Greatness of Marriage: Create a Love That Lasts A Lifetime

October 1, 2018 By Alexander Avila

Can marriage be great? Yes, it can. A great marriage is one filled with love, happiness, growth, and success. Research shows that having a successful marriage can increase your happiness level threefold, reduce your chances of having a heart attack, cancer, accidents, or committing suicide, and increase your life span as well as your income potential.

How do your create a great marriage? Here are powerful, strategies that can help make your marriage or long-term love partnership a wonderful, love-filled one:

*Love Yourself: All great marriages begin with loving yourself. When you love yourself, you have more capacity to love your spouse. You don't need to rely on them for every need. Consequently, you are not as possessive, jealous, controlling, or critical—you are more compassionate, patient, loving, generous, and forgiving. You can contribute your own greatness to the marriage, as they do the same.

*Love Others: Research shows that marriages are more successful and happier when each partner has outside platonic friends (at least one) they can talk to. These friends, also known as "emotional specialists" take pressure off a spouse to fulfill all the emotional needs of their partner. Although it is healthy to rely on your spouse for emotional support, sometimes friends can fill in certain gaps, i.e. the advice-giving friend, the butt-kicking (change a bad habit) friend, the funny friend, the friend to cry with, or talk trash to. With a diversified social portfolio (different friends for different reasons), the married couple feel excited and happy when they come back to each other after being energized by their (good) friends—they appreciate their partner even more as a result.

*Love A Higher Nature: Another important finding is that couples are happier when they are "equally yoked,"—they share the same spiritual values and perspective. Their values can range from traditional religion, nontraditional spirituality, or simply fostering good psycho-spiritual values such as gentleness, kindness, compassion, empathy, gratitude, forgiveness, and love. When couples focus on something higher than themselves (a spiritual practice or doing good in the world), they feel happier, as well as more connected and contented.

*Have A Growth Versus Destiny Marriage: Too many times, married couples give up too soon when they have the "Destiny" marriage mentality—thinking either "we were meant to be" (marriage should be easy if it's the right one), or "we weren't meant to be" (if we struggle, we

should divorce). A better approach is known as the “Growth Marriage”—seeing marriage as a process of growth amidst conflict, differences, and disagreements. The Growth Marriage couple realize that they will have their ups and downs, but ultimately they will work hard to make the marriage successful. Recognizing that all great accomplishments require work, they decide to put in as much emotional effort and time into their marriage as they need to create a happy marriage. By exercising their marriage muscles, they can make their marriage stronger and happier.

*Give Your Spouse the Benefit of the Doubt: In psychology, attribution theory talks about the reasons why we explain other’s behavior, either internally (something about their personality) or externally (something about the situation). In unhappy marriages, the couples are quick to attribute internal causes (lazy, selfish, inconsiderate) for something their partner did wrong (didn’t take out the trash). In happy marriage, couples tend to do the opposite. They look for external reasons for undesirable behavior (because he was tired, he didn’t take out the garbage) and internal reasons for desirable behavior (because she’s sweet, she baked my favorite dessert). The key is to give your partner the benefit of the doubt for behavior you don’t like, while praising them for the good things they do for you.

*Have Exciting Married Dates Together: After being married awhile, couples often fall into a routine: DVD and dinner at home, or if they do something a little extra, it’s going out for dinner and a movie. Unfortunately, this type of repetitive “date night” can become boring and predictable. Research shows that “exciting” married dates (90 minutes once a week) lead to greater marital satisfaction. Exciting doesn’t have to be doing anything too daredevil like bungee jumping or parachuting together, but it can mean taking a fun day trip together, trying a new hobby or activity such as taking dance lessons, and even experimenting in the lovemaking department (different positions, places, and accessories). The key is for both spouses to believe that they are participating in an experience that is helping them grow and expand as human beings. When they do this, they create pleasant memories that they can store into their “marriage memory bank,” (holding place for positive memories)—giving them the ability to recall these pleasant experiences any time they want to boost their sense of marital happiness.

*Savor the Positive Things With Your Mate: Too many times, married couples focus on the negative parts of the relationship—the things they don’t like about their partner (lovemaking style, personal and financial habits, personality)—instead of celebrating the good parts of each other and the marriage. When couples take the time to tell each other good news and celebrate (savor), they feel better about themselves and their marriage. In this way, they can brag about a small success at work, relish how their child did well in school, or reminisce about a great time they had recently on a romantic date—talking and reliving those special moments will enhance their sense of gratitude for each other and their marriage (instead of taking it for granted).

If you practice the strategies just described, you will be on your way to having a happy and successful marriage. Spend time with your partner in exciting and fun ways, communicate the right way, look for the good and not the bad; love yourself, others, and a higher nature. And, above all, keep working and growing with your marriage as you exercise your love marriage muscles with passion and love. Before long, you will find yourself in a great marriage that stands

the test of time.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GREAT MARRIAGES, TUNE IN TO DR. AVILA'S PODCAST, LOVE UNVERSITY ON ITUNES AND PODBEAN, FOR PODCAST SEGMENT: THE GREATNESS OF MARRIAGE: FRIENDS FIRST, LOVERS FOREVER

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