The 7 Secrets to A Wonderful Marriage

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The marriage statistics are getting gloomier. Based on current research statistics, now there's a 50% chance of first marriages ending in divorce within 7 years, and there's a 67% likelihood that a marriage will fail within the first 4 decades. Sadly, the lifetime marriages of our grandparents seem like a thing of the past.

Is there a solution? Fortunately, good progress has been made in studying the science of marriage by esteemed psychologist, Dr. John Gottman, author of The 7 Principles for Making Marriage Work. Dr. Gottman has created a remarkable "love lab" where he systematically studies married couples in a controlled apartment setting, with videotaping cameras, physiological measures such as blood pressure and heart rate, and one way mirrors. His conclusions are fascinating: Based on his findings, Dr. Gottman says that he can predict, within the first five minutes of observing couples interact, whether they will stay together or divorce. His accuracy rate of predicting divorce is 91%.

According to Dr. Gottman, the quality of the couple's friendship is one of the keys to determining marital success. Moreover, he has discovered 7 simple rules, based on his longstanding research with married couples, that can help husbands and wives stay together. They are:

1. Enhance Your Love Maps: Know your partner intimately--what they crave and hate--and cater to your partner's love maps. If they love that chicken drumstick, make sure they always get the last one. It's the little things that often make a big difference in building love and respect in a relationship.

2. Nurture Your Fondness and Admiration For Your Mate: Remember what first attracted you to your partner--what made you fall in love with them--and keep that memory in your mind on a day-to-day basis. Develop an attitude of daily appreciation and gratefulness for your partner and everything he or she has meant to you.

3. Turn Toward Each Other Instead of Away: Seek each other for comfort. Affairs are often a symptom of a marriage that has lost its intimacy, trust, and respect. Learn to take the side of your mate, empathize with them--create an "us versus them" mentality" that will help you forge a stronger bond.

4. Let Your Partner Influence You: This is especially critical for husbands. Husbands who accept their wive's influence and input are often in happier marriages than those who don't. When you

are open to your mate and their ideas, you will also have a higher level of respect and appreciation for your partner.

5. Solve Your Solvable Problems: Agree to disagree, and work on the things you can solve in the marriage. Some things you may never change (differing religious beliefs), but you need to focus on finding a solution for the things that can be changed, and accept the things that can't.

6. Overcome Gridlock: Learn to compromise and solve things that can be solved. Learn what your partner's dreams are, and also learn to respect them. Tell your partner that you support their dream, and keep working to resolve conflicting dreams. The marriages with the highest expectations, and the desire to keep improving their marriages, are often the ones with the most happiness and success.

7. Create Shared Meaning: Create a spiritual aspect of your life together. Foster shared goals, values, symbols, and rituals. In your marriage, do you want to start a business to contribute to society? Do you want to share your enthusiasm with others? Contribute to charitable causes? Perform random acts of kindness? Be leaders and mentors in your community? It's important that couples find a shared higher purpose in marriage, beyond just making love, raising kids, and doing chores. This will help them maintain a strong connection through the ups and downs of daily married life.

One of the features that I like best about the Gottman method is the importance of how couples fight. The harsh start up (starting an argument in a harsh, argumentative, and critical way) is destructive to marriage communication. Learning how to be softer in your marital arguments, in both tone of voice, and choice of words, is very important to making sure that both partners feel appreciated and understood. How you start is often how you will end.

Practice the 7 keys to a wonderful marriage, and you will soon recapture a lot of the spice and love you had when you first got together. Who says the honeymoon can't last for a lifetime?

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