



A Marriage Made in Heaven

MAY 22, 2012

Remember your first date with that special someone?

You spent hours combing through your wardrobe, fixing your hair, and making sure that the food and ambiance were perfect. You staged the “event” like a producer would a Broadway show. Ah yes, you may even have talked to the “big guy upstairs” to make sure that the weather would be glorious.

The day finally approached . . . It was a HUGE success. (BIG sigh.)

What was next? Anticipation (LOTS of it) . . .

Your mind replayed every moment of the date more times than reruns of *The Brady Bunch*. “Did he have as good a time as I had?” “Should I call her now or would it be too pushy?” “I didn’t say that, did I?” You couldn’t seem to get him out of your head even if you tried, but who’s trying? Thinking of her made your heart pound so loudly that you wondered if others could hear it.

More dates. More laughs. More good times. And then it finally happened . . . commitment.

“I, (bride/groom), take you (groom/bride), to be my (husband/wife), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, from this day forward until death do us part.”

Upon reflection, it’s abundantly clear that your entire world revolved around your partner during the courtship phase of the relationship. Yet, as time passes, it’s not unusual for other priorities to sneak in — in fact, some folks may even take their spouse for granted, or at least act that way. Whatever happened to “from this day forward until death do us part”?

What Makes Relationships Last?

Some **basic elements** of a successful relationship include sharing common interests, **communicating** on a regular basis, displaying appreciation and affection, embracing intimacy, and showing real empathy. Honesty, trust, respect, and fidelity are also critical ingredients. Importantly, while the presence of these factors won’t necessarily enhance the relationship, because they’re expected, the absence of any of these qualities can turn a marriage from “heavenly” to . . . well, you know.

While best intentions are all well and good, your daily **actions** form the foundation of any successful relationship. As someone once said, “Watch your thoughts, for they become words. Watch your words, for they become actions. Watch your actions, for they become habits. Watch your habits, for they become your character. And watch your character, for it becomes your destiny!” This logic also applies to successful relationships. Actions become habits, which ultimately determine the destiny of your relationship. Here are some positive actions worthy of your consideration:

It’s about us. Be mindful that your focus should shift from me to us and from mine to ours. That being said, it’s still important to build a life together without surrendering your identity.

Be tolerant. Your spouse isn’t perfect. (Neither are you.) Accept your spouse for who he or she is, rather than the person you want him or her to be.

Communicate. Practice active listening, thoughtful speaking, and constructive dialogue. Remember that silence and attention can be forms of communication, too.

Compromise, compromise, compromise. Know what’s important to your spouse. Keep your spouse’s needs in mind at all times and try to be accommodating whenever possible.

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Don't keep score. Be prepared to go the extra mile. Successful relationships don't have a winner and a loser. You both win or lose together.

Pull your weight. A relationship doesn't require a boss. Each participant should share responsibilities appropriately based on the strengths and goals of each individual.

Manage life's ups and downs. Adversity is inevitable. The key is how you deal with it. First, acknowledge that your spouse has good intentions. Second, focus your discussions on the issue — without withdrawing, hurling insults, or getting personal. Most importantly, be supportive when the chips are down. As Oprah Winfrey once said, "Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down."

Keep the romance alive. Find happiness simply being in the presence of one another. As the years go by, build shared experiences and find ways to add spice to your life. Never take the relationship for granted.

Make your relationship a priority. Find balance between work and family, acknowledging that both contribute to your happiness and the strength of your relationship.

Grow older and wiser together. The most exciting part of a long-standing relationship is the growth that you achieve together, building on the promise of your marriage vows into fuller, more capable people joined through love and shared commitment.

Shared **beliefs** and **values** form the heart of every successful relationship and ultimately determine its success. Some values can't be measured in degrees. So, when someone has a strong viewpoint, it's often on either end of the spectrum — black or white. If any of your spouse's viewpoints are the polar opposite of yours, that can make your life together difficult. The key is to understand your spouse's viewpoint and agree on the best way to move forward, which may involve giving it some additional time or enlisting the help of a trusted friend or counselor. The alternative is sweeping the issue under the carpet and waiting till it rears its ugly head. Some areas where good people may differ:

Family. Do you want to have children or remain childless? Do you prefer to have a small or a large family?

Money matters. Are you a spender or a saver? How much sacrifice are you willing to make today to ensure a bright future?

Risk. How much risk are you willing to accept?

Faith. How much significance does religion play in your life?

Togetherness. How much time do you need alone or with the "guys" or "the girls"? How much time would you like to spend with your spouse versus with other couples?

Change. Do you prefer the familiar or relish change?

Roots. Are you open to moving to a different town or do you prefer remaining close to friends and family?

Decisions. Do you believe "major" decisions should be made individually or jointly?

Priorities. Do you strive for balance between home and work?

Desires. Whose needs do you place first, yours or your spouse's?

There are very few things in life as rewarding as having a soul mate. You'll have someone who cheers you on to greatness, provides a shoulder to cry on, and helps you conquer the world. That'll make celebrations more enjoyable and setbacks more bearable. Having a soul mate will bring out the very best in you, making you the person you want to be rather than the person you are. In fact, you'll know your soul mate as well as the person in the mirror. Over time, you'll communicate with your soul mate without even uttering a word. That'll make it seem as though there's no challenge too large, no problem too insurmountable, and no dream unattainable as long as you have your soul mate by your side.

Sure, every relationship requires commitment and hard work. But it's absolutely worth it! So, never stop courting your spouse. And you'll be among the lucky couples who live happily ever after.

Frank Sonnenberg, a marketing strategist, has written four books and published over 300 articles. *Managing with a Conscience (2nd edition)* is recognized as one of the top 10 Small Business Books of 2012 • Trust Across America named Sonnenberg one of the Top 100 Thought Leaders of 2011 and 2012 • In 2011, *Social Media Marketing Magazine* (SMM) selected Sonnenberg as one of the top marketing authors in the world on Twitter. • Salon.com named Sonnenberg's blog among the top 100 in 2009 • www.franksonnenbergonline.com ©2012 Frank Sonnenberg. All rights reserved. If you want to re-post or republish this post, please email frank@franksonnenbergonline.com. Thank you for respecting intellectual capital.