

5 Keys for a Happy Marriage

Sometimes, in places which are known for the inane, you discover a gem. Memes on Facebook are a great example. Neither I nor my husband are prolific “Facebookers”, but we both know what memes are, and they’re mostly stupid. That said, the other day when I gave in to clickbait I found a couple of examples I thought worth repeating:

“Marriage is just texting each other “Do we need anything from the grocery store?” a bunch of times until one of you dies.”

“My wife wanted 2 kittens but I am the man in the house so we got 2 kittens.”

They’re both quite funny, and they’re both very real.

The first one deals with the boredom and monotony of marriage. It’s so lovely to hear that a grandpa and grandma, after 70 years of marriage, died next to each other just two hours apart. But this is more like a Hollywood romance and not so much like your standard suburban marriage.

A long, long relationship with one other person, where each day their same old bad habits are in your face from the get-go, does not feel romantic – almost all the time. I’m not saying that my husband has lots of bad habits (we both have some), but that romantic feelings can be replaced by a nagging irritation at the bad habits of the other.

Meme 2 raises one of the other great challenges of marriage: compromise. I understand that it also light-heartedly jokes about this husband wanting to “wear the pants”, but realising he doesn’t. But it also involves one spouse giving in for the betterment of the relationship. For two people with different viewpoints, tastes and preferences, both often stressed with daily life, and who want different things for their house and their family, compromise is necessary, very challenging, but

really worthwhile.

My husband and I are both clear that there's no single, magic ingredient to a happy marriage, but there are a few things which we agree are fundamental for all. We could talk about the topic for days, but for the sake of simplicity we'll keep it to a round list of five things that we think are important for your marriage:

1. *Forgive.* If you read this far and no further, you'll still take a home a gem tonight. Saying "Hey, I appreciate your apology and I'm sorry too. Let's move on," and meaning it, is the oft forgotten companion of an apology. Of course, this means that one of you has to suck it up and admit a mistake, but it's equally important that the other half can accept an apology and admit any part they may have played in the conflict. Make up no matter what it costs, otherwise there will be a wall between the two of you, built by the bricks of your unresolved conflicts.
2. *The most important relationship in your family is between you and your spouse.* If deep romance and friendship between you is a thing of the past, you can, and should, rediscover it. It's easy to disappear into your work or focus on the kids and ignore your spouse, but your relationship is the foundation for your family. It really helps to regularly spend some time (but not too much) away from your children together, just enjoying each other's company. The time investment is worthwhile.
3. *Listen if you don't like listening, and talk if you don't like talking.* Each person has to do a lot of both, but understanding whether you have a tendency to clam up or to be disinterested is key. Your spouse needs to know what you're thinking and feeling, and you need to know the same about your spouse. If you don't, you're going to miss the mark in communication, and without good

communication your relationship will feel stifled.

4. *Know how the other feels loved.* Knowing how to love means knowing how your spouse will feel loved. If this means an affectionate touch, a phone call during the day, a kind word, or making him or her a cup of tea, then do it. It costs you little, and gains you a lot. After years of marriage it can be easy to take your spouse for granted, but these small things can show them each day that you continue to love them.
5. *Compromise.* Just give in. By tomorrow morning will you really care whether you watched Batman or Casablanca? Once you've had dinner does it matter if you ate Japanese or Thai? Again, you give a little and you gain a lot.

A final word: we both know that these pointers are hard to put into practice. It can be difficult to forgive and make up after a fight, and we can struggle to put time aside for each other when the kids are needy, your job demanding, and your house a mess.

But it's worth it. It's totally worth it.

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