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MAKING A MARRIAGE WORK

From: Stuart, R.B. & Jacobson, B. (1985). Second Marriage.
New York: W.W.Norton.

Making a Marital Choice

- Principle 1: If there is anything we very much want in a partner, we should find someone who already has it. We can't trust the power of our love to create what is not there initially.
- Principle 2: We shouldn't marry anyone we don't love, but we should never make the mistake of marrying for love alone.
- Principle 3: While we may be stimulated by people who are different from us, those most like us tend to be better choices as mates.
- Principle 4: Marry for yourself, not for anyone else.

Attitudes Needed to Make a Marriage Work

1. Realistic expectations that every marriage has good and bad times.
2. The willingness to examine your role in every positive and negative exchange in your relationship.
3. The willingness to consider everything negotiable, with no demands that your partner accept your way of doing things without fair consideration of alternatives.
4. The willingness to consistently learn to understand your partner's point of view.
5. A commitment to try different ways of doing things long enough to see if the new way works.
6. The maturity to forgive your partner for mistakes made in good faith efforts to make your marriage better.

Communication

1. When we think about communication, we usually consider only spoken words. But the manner in which things are said, including voice tone, eye contact, and gestures, reveals more of the message than words ever convey. And actions, or even lack of action, are even more powerful than spoken messages.
2. Whenever there is a conflict between what is said and what is done, the words will be ignored and the actions will be taken as truth.
3. Since we cannot NOT behave, we cannot NOT communicate.
4. We often forget that others may honestly see things differently, and their view is as true for them as ours is for us.
5. Many of us often act as if listening involves nothing more than staying silent while another person talks. Instead of thinking about what's being said, we silently rehearse what we plan to say as soon as the speaker pauses for a breath. Often, the speech of others seems like little more than a tedious interruption of our own expression of ideas.
6. Good listeners are active listeners. To set the stage for active listening, we must curb our tendency to hear only the words, to judge without asking questions, or to gather only enough details to allow us to plan our own response. We can't assume that everyone thinks the way we do, or means what we would have meant had we said the same things. There is only one way to understand another person's perspective: Ask!
7. Like listening, the process of affirming the worth of another person is really quite simple. We must always convey respect for our partners' opinions, regardless of whether or not we agree.
8. To appreciate the importance of acceptance, we should remember that we constantly seek approval from those we love and respect. When we feel that our thoughts, feelings, or opinions are not respected by those whose opinions matter, our defenses go up and productive conversation is almost impossible. Once threatened, our energy is diverted from understanding to defensiveness. We can increase our awareness of the other person's point of view, and have true understanding, only when there is mutual trust.
9. Suggestions for straightforward communication.
 - a. Put negative feelings into words rather than acting them out. Positive feelings can be stated both verbally and nonverbally.
 - b. Use "I" when making statements about your thoughts or feelings. This clearly shows that the opinions are your own, and not those of your spouse or friends.
 - c. State your thoughts directly and honestly, but only if you can also meet the requirements of tact and consideration.

Conflict: Making it Work for You

1. The only way to avoid conflict in marriage is to stay single. No marriage is conflict-free.
2. Underlying most arguments is one simple concern: My partner doesn't give me enough love, respect, or caring.
3. Most marital conflicts involve the issue of autonomy (or separateness) vs. mutuality (or connectedness). The challenge of forming a unity of two people without sacrificing either person's individuality is not an easy one to meet. Conflict is therefore a normal byproduct of the complications that arise any time two people try to function both as a unified couple and as separate individuals.
4. Few marital breakups are caused by major betrayals or disasters; most result from small but frequent acts of inconsideration, disrespect, and hostility. So it's crucial to learn constructive ways of dealing with differences while they're still minor.
5. Watch the dirty fighting techniques.
 - a. Name calling.
 - b. Overgeneralizing.
 - c. Alluding to family patterns.
 - d. Gunnysacking.
 - e. Using counter-accusations.
 - f. Mind-reading.
6. Resolving conflict.
 - a. Agree that conflict is not a catastrophe, and that you both still respect each other and the relationship. Agree to use the two-winner model.
 - b. Exchange points of view, making sure you both ask questions and check out your understanding. Explain points of view openly, but tactfully. Don't fight dirty.
 - c. Define the problem, acknowledging both points of view. Focus on issues, not personalities.
 - d. Search for solutions.
 - e. Arrive at an agreement that is acceptable to both.

- f. Make some plans or resolutions for how to avoid similar conflicts in the future.
7. When all is said and done, forgiveness is one of the strongest expressions of love.
8. Couples can strengthen marriage and intimacy by daily caring behaviors.
 - a. The acts must be simple.
 - b. The acts must be positive.
 - c. Finally, the acts must be specific.