

## A VERY HAPPY MARRIAGE

January 1, 2002

You might enjoy and benefit from some of the ideas I compiled a long time ago.

I met my wife just after she submitted her mission papers. I gave her an engagement ring before she left, and I waited for her while she served a mission to Argentina. While waiting, I had a lot of time to think on the subject of a happy marriage, and to make some plans. Toward the end of her mission, one of my favorite pass-times became asking people what tips they had for one who was about to embark upon the tides of matrimony (not only asking those with happy marriages, but also learning important lessons from those with unhappy marriages and unmarried people). The answers ranged from "don't do it" to any number of very valuable suggestions. I realized that in order to have a pleasant and lasting marriage, positive and deliberate plans needed to be made. I thought of the beautiful young woman I was about to marry and I didn't want to jeopardize a potentially great marriage by making the same mistakes so many others had made. Many of the ideas contained herein I owe to my friends and relatives who shared them. Unfortunately for credit's sake many of the thoughts are in my mind without the recollection of the names of the individuals who so graciously shared them with me, but their thoughts have greatly benefited my marriage and my life.

Although some of these thoughts seem contradictory to one another, when balanced out in time and particular circumstances, they all have merit.

Agree to disagree

The Talmud

Disagree agreeably.

The Talmud

Learn to discuss differences without personalizing them.

Milton N. Hepworth

All marriages are happy. The problems come trying to live together.

Gilbert Scharffs

Don't tell your spouse to do anything, always ask.

When in the midst of conflict, be careful not to damage each other's ego.

Gilbert Scharffs

Never be jealous of your spouse's accomplishments. Be pleased with them. Consider compliments to your spouse, a tribute to you -- that you were clever enough to attract such a person.

It is not advisable to win arguments with your spouse. Benjamin Franklin triumphed over a friend in an argument but later felt great remorse at having lost that friend because of the way in which he "won" the argument.

When you are in an argument with your spouse, if your goal is to win the argument, your priorities are misplaced.

Don't allow yourself to become too angry or to stay angry.

When a conflict occurs, stick to the subject, don't bring up old topics especially if they have been resolved, or nothing more can be done about them.

When disagreements come, try to decide WHAT'S RIGHT -- not WHO'S RIGHT.

Gilbert Scharffs

Don't tell your wife how well your mother used to cook, especially after a rather disappointing meal.

Don't say "my mom used to cook it such and such a way." At least when you are first married.

Even the best of marriages have their trying moments. Realize this, and strive to overcome the difficult times with love and increased respect for one another.

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

Proverbs 15:1

He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty...

Proverbs 16:32

It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.

Proverbs 21:19

Go for understanding, not necessarily agreement.

Bonnie Rice

Talking-- listening-- patience, willingness to learn enough before jumping to quick conclusions: Sometimes in just letting them talk and using us for listening, they will come soberly, safely to their own conclusions. But when two people both talk at once, when they cut each other short, or when they don't talk at all, there aren't likely to be any satisfactory solutions.

Richard L. Evans \*

When a confrontation occurs, **DON'T WALK AWAY FROM YOUR SPOUSE**, or storm out of the room. (If you are about to lose control, as quietly as you can, tell your spouse that you can't handle the situation right now, and you'll try to work it out later, then politely leave.)

Jerry Buley

Don't speak of your differences when you are angry. Wait until both of you are in calm moods before bringing up touchy subjects.

If you want your idea rejected, be sure to bring it up when your spouse is in a bad mood.

When conflicts occur, don't ridicule your spouse. If you listen to her/his opinion, giving it honest consideration, then expressing your opinion, as your opinion, you'll avoid a multitude of problems.

By saying something in anger or rage, we can do much damage. Those same words, if spoken with love, concern and care can accomplish much good.

When emotions run high, reason and logic usually run out.

Prejudice is a great time saver, you don't need to know the facts before you make a decision.

If you find yourself speaking loudly or harshly to your spouse, at least you are in the wrong for this act. Calm down and discuss problems using love and courtesy.

Don't yell at your spouse. Sometimes it is necessary to loudly call to him/her, but calling to, and yelling at are vastly different.

If we could remember to treat our spouse as well as we would want an acquaintance to treat our mother, or our brother, or our daughter, or our son, how happy our marriage would be.

Speak kindly to one another. Sometimes we treat strangers with more courtesy and respect than the person we should love the most.

When speaking to others of your spouse's likes and dislikes, never speak of them in a demeaning way. If you show acceptance and support in your conversation, your love and loyalty will be known. If you speak in a critical manner, your discord will be shown.

Recently, at a party, I heard a woman say that her husband likes documentary television programs. The tone of ridicule made me uncomfortable. She seemed to be saying, "because his tastes are not the same as mine, they aren't good." She was revealing hostilities in their relationship which had no appropriate place at the party. Had she said the same words with humor, it could have been a pleasant part of the conversation.

Don't contradict your spouse in front of others. Don't contradict your spouse at all. Allow for the possibility that he/she may have remembered it more accurately than you. You may later tell how you recalled the event. Usually it seems to work best for me if I say it in the form of a question such as: "Wasn't it...?" Maybe neither of you remembered it correctly, but don't turn it into an "I'm right and your wrong" confrontation. Too many bitter arguments and hurt feelings are triggered when one contradicts another, having remembered something differently.

Try to discern the things which spark hostilities. As a boy I noticed that on a number of occasions bitterness flared up between relatives when one would contradict the other as a story or event was told. The contradictions were nearly always over some insignificant detail which did not have much bearing on the message of the story. The hostility detracted and made those listening uncomfortable.

Don't be sarcastic to or about your spouse.

Dale O Zabriskie

Never intentionally insult your spouse. Especially not in front of others.

Realize that occasionally your spouse will be late and will not be in a position where s/he is able to contact you. Plan on a few waiting sessions, and don't allow yourself to be angry.

If you are going to be late, if possible, have enough courtesy to get word to your spouse.

Be willing to do nice things for your spouse. Do things for him/her sometimes when you know your acts will probably go unnoticed. Do nice things because they are the right thing to do, not to seek thanks or praise.

Realize that at one time or another, all of us have our sensitive days -- our time to be crabby. There are times when little things can really disturb us. Things, which are normally insignificant, can touch off all kinds of hostility if we aren't careful. Be alert to times when you are in such a mood, and exercise caution. I even warn my family when I feel such a mood coming, and ask them to beware and be patient.

Realize that there will be times when feelings will be intense - over seemingly trivial matters.

Men should not suffer reverses and unpleasant circumstances to sour their natures and render them fretful and unsocial at home, speaking words full of bitterness... to their wives and children, creating gloom and sorrow in their habitations, making themselves feared rather than beloved by their families.

Brigham Young \*

Be sure to help your wife. Help her to keep the house clean. Help her to haul out the junk and to make the house a nice place to live.

Maurine Christensen Barker

A woman went to her lawyer seeking his aid in obtaining a divorce. She told him that she was extremely angry with her husband, and wanted to hurt him as much as possible. The wise man helped her devise a plan to "do just that." He suggested that if she were to leave him under the current conditions, he'd probably be relieved and welcome the divorce. He told her to go home and pretend to be madly in love with him for six weeks. To treat him like a king, trying to anticipate his needs and wants. To do so many nice things for him that when she did leave, the deep hurt she desired would be felt. A few months later, the wise attorney saw his friend and

asked if she was ready to go ahead with the divorce. She replied, "Oh, no, my husband has really changed."

Allow your spouse 10 faults which you overlook and do not try to correct. When you feel annoyed by one of them, say to yourself "That's one of the ten."

Mrs. David O. McKay \*

Don't expect your husband to have all the good qualities of your father - with none of his faults.

Little disagreements can turn into big fights when the people are too worried about being proved wrong.

Michele Zabriskie

Be willing to admit it when you are wrong.

Be gracious when your spouse admits an error. Don't gloat or ridicule.

Don't make major purchases without first consulting with your spouse. Agree in advance what to consider major.

Together work out a budget so that each of you have some money which you can spend without having to account for. It may be only a small amount, but some personal funds can help avoid conflicts which plague many couples.

Don't spend more than you earn. A high percentage of marital problems arise from financial difficulties.

One of the greatest tributes a woman can pay her husband is to live on his salary.

Janet Bernheisel

Each of us is responsible for our own happiness. We should not expect our spouse to make us happy.

Ken Rice

If you want to have a happy marriage, be a happy person.

Nothing outside me has the power to offend me without my consent.

Vere X. Campbell

Most people are about as happy as they make up their mind to be.

Abraham Lincoln \*

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

Proverbs 17:22

Marriage is war. I've heard people refer to their spouses as "the war department". The only weapons appropriate to such a war are LOVE and KINDNESS.

Marriages don't fail. It is people who fail - to maintain the love and courtesy which they must have shared as they approached marriage.

No other success can compensate for failure in the home.

David O. McKay

Marriage is serious business. Give it the attention it deserves.

If marriage is left unattended, as with most other things in mortality, it experiences the effects of "the law of decay". Unless it is nourished, and cared for, it becomes spoiled, and rotten.

Intimate marital relationships are the icing on the cake. If the cake is moldy and rotten, no amount of frosting can make it good.

Marriage is a fine and sacred thing if you make it so.

William Lyon Phelps \*

Too many people devote incredible amounts of time to perfecting their fishing technique, improving their sports ability, or filling their brains with movies or television programs, and very little time cultivating the most important relationship of their life.

The most important work you will do... will be within the walls of your own home.

Harold B. Lee \*

Make it a point to avoid the "what's to eat" habit. If "what's to eat?" is the first phrase out of your mouth as you walk into the house, or if "any mail?" is the main topic of your usual phone conversation, your priorities are in question.

All things need watching, working at, caring for, and marriage is no exception. Marriage is not something to be indifferently treated or abused, or something that simply takes care of itself. Nothing neglected will remain as it was or is, or will fail to deteriorate. All things need attention, care and concern, and especially so in the most sensitive of all relationships of life.

Richard L. Evans \*

Marriage is for "adults only" --not necessarily of years, but maturity of attitude -- the maturity to know that there aren't any perfect people, that nothing is ever altogether as anticipated, that the years change us and others. Marriage requires the maturity to adjust, to forgive, to understand, to be forgiven.

Richard L. Evans \*

When one puts business or pleasure above his home, he that moment starts on the downgrade to soul-weakness.

David O. McKay \*

The most vicious enemy to home life is immorality.

David O. McKay \*

My mother used to tell me to be careful what I said about the relatives of my friends. "Remember, blood is thicker than water." This expression being symbolic of the fact that family ties tend to be stronger and more lasting than other relationships. It is especially significant in relationships with in-laws.

Don't say bad things about your in-laws. If your spouse wants to say bad things about his/her family, that's his/her privilege, but if you say the same words or even agree too heartily, feelings are often hurt.

He is the happiest, be he king or peasant, who finds peace in his home.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe \*



Winning a love once is not enough. Keep re-winning it... In the last analysis, it's up to you to save your marriage.

Hubert S. Howe \*

The most common cause of divorce is selfishness.

Spencer W. Kimball \*

Occasionally sacrifice something you want, so your spouse may enjoy something s/he wants.

Remember that the first and great commandment is to LOVE! If you can always remember to actively love your companion, you will often sacrifice your personal preference for your spouse's benefit.

Be very careful what you ask your wife to do for you. If you can do it just as easily, don't ask.

Compliment your spouse in front of others, particularly your children.

Dale O Zabriskie

Perhaps the worst marriage I've seen was one where the husband would refuse to share -- even to share his wife's thoughts. She told of occasions when he would deliberately skip over certain articles in newspapers or magazines which she had recommended to him. He would leave the room if she tried to initiate conversation which didn't suit his fancy. The sadness he brought into her life because of these and other obnoxious acts, was inexcusable, and certainly avoidable.

Marriage requires the giving and keeping of confidences, the sharing of thoughts and feelings, unfailing respect and understanding, and a frank and gentle communication.

Richard L. Evans \*

Don't Nag!

Try not to be critical of your spouse. Sometimes he/she receives negative feedback from colleagues and acquaintances. Criticism from you, especially after other negative comments, can be devastating.

Once you've settled a disagreement, don't harbor bad feelings because your idea wasn't the one chosen.

Few displays of selfishness have struck me with such amazement as when a friend of mine became angry with his wife for spending \$200 on clothing for herself - after he had voiced his approval of the purchase. His anger over the pre-approved purchase was bad enough, but even worse, was the fact that during the few months prior to the event, he had spent nearly \$1,000 on fishing equipment.

Don't let your spouse suffer because of excess devotion to making life "good" (in terms of material pursuit).

Don't think that just spending time nearby is spending time "with" your spouse. Two people can be in the same room physically, and yet be miles apart.

Have joy, but don't be proud. Joy in each other and rejoicing in positive or wholesome achievement can be extremely good and important. Being too proud to admit error, or poor judgment, or being too proud to accept an idea coming from your spouse over your own idea can all be extremely destructive to you as an individual as well as to your marriage.

Pay attention to those who seem to have the happy and great marriages. Do they quarrel or become hostile when disagreements occur? Do they speak disrespectfully of each other? Do they "cut" each other? Do they pout? Not the truly great ones!

Don't speak of your spouse's faults with friends, acquaintances, or especially relatives.

Don't go running home to your Mother or Father over your problems.  
Never be dishonest with your spouse, but don't always speak your mind.

Do at least one deliberately nice thing for your spouse each day. This is in addition to the normal duties like going to work and caring for the home and family.

A person is a fool who takes offense when no offense is intended, and usually a fool even when offense is intended.

The following 10 suggestions are from Nathaniel Branden, Ph.D. found in his book "Did You Hug Your Husband Today?"

1. Say "I love you" often. Words keep feelings alive.

2. Give him one passionate kiss a day-- he'll be delighted.
3. Hold his hand or take his arm when you are walking together. Small signs of physical affection show how much you care.
4. Listen when he talks. Remember people and places he talks about and bring them up again.
5. Surprise him frequently with unexpected gifts that say "I was thinking of you today."
6. Pay him compliments. Say "You look terrific in that suit," or "That was a kind thing to do."
7. Let him know he's appreciated. Don't forget to say thank you for the little things he does.
8. Show him he's admired. Brag a bit about him to your friends when he's around.
9. Pick one of his annoying habits that you always comment on and, next time he does it, surprise him by saying nothing. (No disapproving glances either!)
10. When he makes a mistake he wouldn't have made if he had followed your advice, swallow the "I told you so" and offer sympathy and understanding instead.

The following 5 suggestions are from Dian Ritter in her book "Ginger Snaps":

1. Making marriage work is like running a farm. You have to start all over again each morning.
2. The great secret of successful marriage is to treat all disasters as incidents and none of the incidents as disasters.
3. Show me a happily married couple and I'll show you two people un-worried about who is the better half.
4. Some wives have terrible memories, they never forget anything.

Do and say things which will strengthen your spouse's self esteem.

Never degrade or berate your spouse, especially in front of others. While in Junior High School, I heard that people can become ill when others tell them that they look sick. A few of my friends and I randomly selected a classmate and we each told her (at different times and places that morning) that she didn't look well. She went home from school that day, ill.

Always be grateful. Express thanks often, even for the routine things your spouse does - like preparing a simple dinner, or buying the groceries.

If we love, we permit others to grow and unfold at their own rate and their own way. We do not seek to interfere with their right to be themselves.

Eric Fromm \*

Decide that your marriage will succeed. Avoid the idea that if it doesn't work out you can always call it off.

Ken Rice

The marriage is not in the hands of fate or the stars or the position of the planets or the winds of chance. The success of the relationship is in the hands of the two people involved. If they decide to make it work and stay with it, it will succeed.

Ken Rice

If your wife asks you to do something, do it. She doesn't ask unless she really wants your help.

Reid E. Bankhead

This is the true nature of home-- it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division.

John Ruskin \*

A positive, supportive attitude permeates all we do or say, so does a negative, or hostile one. It shows itself through little, insignificant things. A simple act like tossing a child's beanbag to your spouse can communicate love, friendship, caring, rejection, hostility or malice. Very subtle differences in velocity, trajectory, timing, accompanying sounds, and in the appearance of the launching device (you) can communicate very different messages.

Some people see the thorns on the rose bushes, others see the roses on the thorn bushes, and others see the roses on the rose bushes.

Be cheerful and try to maintain a happy disposition and a positive outlook on life.

Be generous with compliments.

A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it till afterwards.

Proverbs 29:11

A gift in secret pacifieth anger...

Proverbs 21:14

It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.

Proverbs 21:9

A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.

Proverbs 15:18

A couple must set aside a special time for talk. If possible, it should be a non-stressful period. A time each day when they can talk about issues that are important to them, in a non-threatening way.

Ken Rice

Be alert to your wife's moods and feelings. If she is feeling "pressured" try to take the time to help out.

A couple should discuss (prior to, or at least soon after their marriage) their feelings about family responsibility. If the husband feels very strongly that he wants his shirts, underwear, or whatever, laundered in a special way, he should be prepared to launder them himself. In the same way, all of the household chores should be divided, each partner trying to make life a bit better for the other.

Ken Rice

Be reluctant to ask your spouse to do things. But when s/he asks you to do something, do it.

Miriam Zabriskie

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained... only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned: By kindness... without hypocrisy, and without guile-- Reproving betimes with sharpness... and then showing forth afterwards and increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy.

Doctrine & Covenants 121:41-43

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.

Proverbs 12:15

Be partners in the family transactions. Consult your spouse before making decisions affecting her/him.

Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.

Proverbs 13:18

A great proportion of the wretchedness which has embittered married life, has originated in a negligence of trifles... It is a sensitive plant, which will not bear even the touch of unkindness; a delicate flower, which indifference will chill and suspicion blast. It must be watered by the showers of tender affection, expanded by the cheering glow of kindness, and guarded by the impregnable carrier of unshaken confidence. Thus matured, it will bloom with fragrance in every season of life, and sweeten even the loneliness of declining years.

Thomas Sprat \*

If you were paddling a canoe together, the important thing is that each paddle in the same direction. In marriage, if each has a different goal, they will always be in trouble.

Dr. Paul W. Popenoe \*

Whatever woman may cast her lot with mine, should any ever do so, it is my intention to do all in my power to make her happy and contented; and there is nothing I can imagine that would make me more unhappy than to fail in the effort.

Abraham Lincoln \*

Keep thy eyes wide open before marriage; and half shut afterward.

Thomas Fuller \*

Marriage should be something worked toward with every step you take. It shouldn't be an unforeseen emergency, like being called upon unexpectedly to make a speech on a subject you've never heard of.

Margaret Lee Runbeck

Two persons who have chosen each other out of all the [rest], with the design to be each other's mutual comfort and entertainment, have, in that action, bound themselves to be good humored, affable, discreet, forgiving, patient, and joyful, with respect to each other's frailties and imperfections, to the end of their lives.

Joseph Addison \*

The art of living together happily is perhaps one of the greatest of all the arts... Naturally...all sorts of adjustments are called for... Quarrels and disputes are sure to come, (but) the great thing is not to let them last.

William Lyon Phelps \*

If you want to have a happy marriage, marry your best friend.

If you didn't marry your best friend, at least treat her like she is.

If she isn't your best friend, try to get her to be your best friend.

If you want to make friends, don't try to make others see how important you are, try to make them see how important they are.

If you want to have a best friend, be a best friend.

David McKay Barker

\*Quotations noted with an asterisk are taken from the "Richard Evans' Quote Book.