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DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:


- After sharing his story of growing up in a communist apartment, Professor Smirnoff reveals that, “My parents laughed. At that moment, I felt that I was in the presence of love. As a child, I made the discovery that laughter must be the way people let each other know they are happy.” How do you think that living in such conditions shaped Professor Smirnoff’s worldview, perspective, and attitudes towards life? Why do you think that this discovery so important to Professor Smirnoff?
- Next in the video, Professor Smirnoff informs us that, “For over four decades, Dr. John Gottman, Professor of Psychology at the University of Washington, has studied thousands of couples in both successful relationships and not-so-successful ones. ‘Couples who laugh together,’ he concludes, ‘last together.’” What do you think compelled Dr. Gottman to devote his career researching the subject? Do you think that this subject is worth researching? Why or why not? Why do you think that Dr. Gottman’s conclusion about couples is the case- in other words what is it about laughter that makes such it a good predictor of success in relationships?
- Professor Smirnoff answers the last question when he explains, “Here’s how it works: we make each other happy first and then laughter reassures us that we are on the right track.” Why do you think that people in a relationship need such a reassurance? What might some other types of reassurances that the connection is on the right track be?
- Professor Smirnoff then charges us to, “...listen for laughter in your relationship. And not just any laughter – listen for moments when you share laughter together. If that isn’t happening just about every day, it is time to do something about it.” What type of moments and situations might best be ‘primed’ for sharing laughter together?
- More than that, Professor Smirnoff further challenges us by stating, “To laugh together, you need to be together. And that literally means time together. You need to start by making a decision that time together is important and it’s not negotiable. Set a date night, take dance lessons, a cooking class. Doesn’t matter what you do. You just have to do it.” What other messages does choosing to spend time with someone else send to that person? What might be some ways that a partner could make the other one laugh without being physically present? What are some of your favorite activities to do with a partner when laughter could occur?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: 9 Secrets of a Happy Marriage

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “The 9 Secrets of a Happy Marriage,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What does the research show regarding people who are married to one partner? What do happy marriages have an abiding sense of? What is the 6th ‘secret?’ What is the 7th ‘secret?’
- Do you think that the 6th and 7th ‘secrets’ support Professor Smirnoff’s postulation? Why or why not? In what ways might the 6th and 7th ‘secrets be synergistic?
- Do you think that the laughter/love mechanism could extend to groups of people as well? Why or why not? How might Professor Smirnoff’s message about laughter and love be applied to animals and pets, considering that most animals can’t laugh?



QUIZ

LOVE NEEDS LAUGHS

1. What did Yakov Smirnoff learn as a child?

- a. Silence must be the way people communicate to one another that they're happy.
- b. Laughter must be the way people communicate to one another that they're happy.
- c. Gifts must be the way people communicate to one another that they're happy.
- d. None of the above.

2. Couples who laugh together, _____.

- a. need marital counseling
- b. are often carefree
- c. have more friends
- d. last together

3. What may be the best way to tell if your relationship has gone off course?

- a. Dwindling phone calls.
- b. The fading away of laughter.
- c. Frequent arguments.
- d. Spending more time together.

4. Money can let you know how much happiness you have in your relationship.

- a. True
- b. False

5. How do you get the laughter back in your relationship if you've lost it?

- a. Get into a new relationship.
- b. Spend time apart.
- c. Spend time together.
- d. It isn't possible.



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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The 9 Secrets of a Happy Marriage

Relationship strategies that make your marriage work



"The 9 Secrets of a Happy Marriage" courtesy of [adwriter](#)

He looks wearily at her, shakes his head, and asks: "Whatever happened to us? We don't laugh any more; we used to always be laughing!"

She looks at him, contempt leaking like a North Sea oil spill: "Yes, but not at the same time."

This one line of comedy within a classic moment from the British sitcom *Fawlty Towers* illuminated an entire relationship.

A happy long-lasting marriage: Really? Is it still possible? Well, I guess we'll have to wait fifty years to find out. Of course, no one should stay in an abusive marriage. If you're being abused and bullied then your spouse has defaulted on 'the deal' anyway (remember the 'to love and to cherish' part of the vows?). But our 'throw away society' may mean that perfectly good relationships are too quickly discarded because they don't seem ideal.

The irony is that the modern obsession with 'personal fulfilment' - the importance of the self at the expense of the other - has left *more* people unfulfilled, sad, and lonely. Marriages crash

and burn as spouses are updated for newer, 'better' ones. Have the ideas of commitment, duty, and responsibility been ditched at the *expense* of happiness?

A happy marriage is healthy

Marriage may seem as old-fashioned as sepia tone, but repeated research shows that people who remain married to one partner are the happiest (1) and that married people are statistically happier and live longer (2) than their non-married counterparts. Do we even know why some marriages work and some don't? Fortunately for this article, we do. We now know what happy marriages should avoid and also what needs to be encouraged to make marriages healthier and happier.

Of course no marriage is perfect, but many are happy. Happy marriages have difficulties, but there is an abiding sense of 'us', not just 'you and me'. Follow these strategies (both of you) and who knows - maybe you'll be telling me fifty years hence of all the health, psychological benefits, and happiness you've enjoyed.

So first:

1) Be realistic with your relationship expectations

Romance is wonderful and seeing the best in your partner is a sure way to maintain love and intimacy. But you are going to have years with your spouse, so you need to be able to except some imperfections. In the first throes of passion, the object of our romantic focus may seem perfect but then we discover their 'feet of clay'. At this point, for the marriage to last we need to see beyond personal weaknesses and foibles - after all, no one is perfect. All marriages need work sometimes; expecting it all to be effortless or that it 'should' always be perfect creates disappointment (as unrealistic expectations always do).

Idealize your partner, by all means - but remember they are human.

2) Sorry should not be the hardest word

Ever noticed how some people can never apologize, never admit they were wrong, never say, "Sorry"? Yes? Well, those are the ones who are much *less* likely to become or stay married

A survey conducted in San Francisco (3) found that people who stay happily married are twice as likely to be able and willing to apologize to their partners as divorced or single people are. The survey found happily married people are 25% more likely to apologize first, even if they only feel partially to blame. The harder divorced and single people found it ever to apologize or make conciliatory gestures, the more likely they were to stay single.

Romance and passion may bring couples together, but compromise and respect will keep them there. Learn to say sorry.

3) Drive those relationship-ruining riders out of town

Some couples argue passionately but *still* have a happy marriage. Others argue less but when they do, the relationship is severely damaged. What's the difference?

It's not *whether* you argue but *how* you argue that determines the likelihood that your marriage will survive long-term. US psychologist John Gottman has spent almost two decades studying the interaction of couples. He can now reliably tell (with up to 95% accuracy!) which couples are destined for relationship breakdown and which are likely to stay together by *listening to the first five minutes of a contentious discussion*.

Gottman highlights four factors that rot relationships. He calls these (dramatically) the 'Four Riders of the Apocalypse'. They are:

1. Contempt: Name calling, face pulling, cursing at and insulting your partner, and basically behaving as if you are revolted is 'contempt'. Gottman and his researchers in Seattle (4) found that if this was a regular feature in the start-up phase of a disagreement, then the relationship's days were very likely to be numbered. Women who looked contemptuous whilst their husband was talking were six times more likely to be divorced two years later.

2. Defensiveness: "Why are you picking on me? Don't look at me like that! What's your problem?!"

"But I was just offering you a cup of tea!"

Another major predictor of eventual relationship breakdown is over-defensiveness. If someone begins yelling as soon as their partner broaches a subject and feels overly threatened or attacked, and this is a continuing and regular feature of the couple's interactions, then the relationship is in crisis. Being defensive blocks communication and severs intimacy.

3. Don't criticize but *do* compliment

Partners who criticize one another risk damaging their relationship beyond repair... This doesn't mean you should never *complain* if your spouse upsets you, but a criticism is much more damaging than a simple complaint.

When you criticize, you attack the *whole* person (even if that's not what you mean to do); a complaint is directed at one-off behaviours rather than the core identity of the person. For example: "You are such a lazy £"*tard!" implies they are *always* like that and that it's a fundamental part of who they are. It's not specific or time-limited as is "I thought you were being a bit lazy today! That's not like you!"

Some partners feel they are trying to 'improve' their spouse by constantly pointing out what is wrong with them. Even if the intention is good, the consequences are not. Criticizing partners publically is humiliating (for both partners), but saying nice things about them when in company is a wonderful thing to do.

People in happy marriages feel appreciated, loved, and respected. Remind your spouse of their talents, strengths, and what you love and like about them much more. No one likes to feel they are under constant attack.

4. Withdrawal or 'stonewalling'

Emotionally withdrawing or stonewalling, 'closing your ears' or 'shutting off' when a partner is complaining is another huge predictor of breakdown. Whilst criticizing was generally more of a female trait, men used stonewalling more. Men's biology is less able to cope with strong emotion than women's, so men may instinctively try to avoid entering arguments or becoming highly aroused by stonewalling.

The partner may withdraw during conversations by 'switching off' or ultimately spend more and more time away from the relationship as a way of 'escaping'. The danger is that the stonewalling pattern will become permanent and the partner using this strategy will use it to isolate themselves from potentially positive parts of the relationship.

Everyone needs space, but *never* responding to an emotional issue leaves the other partner out in the cold.

Rather surprisingly, if even just *one* of these factors or 'riders' is present regularly in disputes, the outlook for the relationship is poor. Does your marriage contain any of these 'riders'?

And how else can you make your marriage happier?

4) Know what *not* to talk about in your marriage

Younger couples often want to 'dig deep' to unearth all their 'issues', to be entirely open with one another, and to 'talk everything through'.

But studies of elderly couples who have been happily married for decades show that these couples often don't listen very carefully to what the other is saying when expressing negative emotion. They also tend to ignore their own feelings about the relationship unless they consider that something *absolutely must be done*. This threshold is set much higher than in younger couples.

So the typical advice of agony aunts to 'air issues' and get 'everything out in the open' doesn't, after all, make for healthy long-term relationships. Agreeing to disagree and knowing which subjects to steer clear of is a key relationship skill.

5) Work out problems but keep a lid on them

Another key factor in arguments within relationships that survive is the habit of changing the subject once the discussion has 'run its course'. This 'quick shift' lessens the amount of negative emotion experienced and decreases the likelihood of later rumination. It also conveys the message, "We can argue, and still get on with each other." Thus, the argument is contained and does not contaminate the whole relationship.

Disagreements need to be 'one-off specials', not long-running serials. But fun is vital, too...

6) Laugh together, stay together

Regularly revisiting romantic times from the past and alluding to them in conversation - "Wasn't it wonderful when we..." and "Do you remember..." - is a powerful way of staying bonded. But regularly laughing together may be even more powerful.

According to recent research, couples who laugh together and regularly reminisce about funny times tend to be much more satisfied with their relationships (5). Create a reservoir of funny times and re-visit them often. Lack of fun can wilt a marriage like a flower denied water.

7) Ensure 5 good times for every bad time

According to Dr Gottman, stable marriages need five good interactions for every not-so-good one. 'Good' could mean a loving hug, a fun afternoon spent together, or a nice chat about a movie, anything positive. A 'bad' interaction may be a row, disagreement, or disappointment.

So make efforts to keep to the 5/1 rule. This will work even better if you follow the next tip.

8) Can you read (love) maps?

Remember the old *Mr. and Mrs.* TV show? (I think it may have been updated.) Anyway, the idea was basically this: The host would ask one partner to go behind a soundproof screen whilst the remaining partner was asked questions about their partner's life and preferences. For example: "Where in the world would your wife most like to travel?" or "What drink would your husband most likely order in a restaurant?" The idea was that the more correlated the answers, the stronger the relationship. And research seems to bear this out:

The more you know your partner's tastes, aspirations, whom they like and dislike at work, and so on, the better 'love map' you have. Knowing the details of your partner's inner and outer life (whilst allowing for *some* privacy) makes for a stronger bond. One woman I worked with didn't know the name of her (underappreciated) husband's company and one husband couldn't tell me the name of their family dog! (Much to his wife's consternation: "He shows no interest!")

Strengthen and update your love maps to better navigate your relationship.

Living within a happy marriage is one way to ensure long-lasting contentment for both of you. Follow these tips and ask your partner to read this, too.

But if you want a fun way to learn how to have a happy marriage by seeing what *not* to do, watch *Fawlty Towers* reruns.

Article written by [Mark Tyrrell](#).