



LOVE NEEDS LAUGHS

YAKOV SMIRNOFF

I grew up in the former Soviet Union. My parents and I lived in a communal apartment with nine other families. When my parents wanted to be romantic they would send me to look out the window.

One day my dad said, “So what did you see out the window?”

I said, “Our neighbors being romantic.”

He said, “How could you tell?”

I said, “Because their son is looking at me.”

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 communicate to one another that they’re happy.

Did you know that there has been actual research into the relationship between laughter and happy marriages? 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.”

Here’s how it works: we make each other happy first and then laughter reassures us that we are on the right track. The fading away of laughter may be the best way to tell if your relationship has gone off course.

So here is what I want you to start doing: 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.

Let me give you an example from my own life. One night, I was putting my son Alexander to bed. He was cranky and crying. My wife said to me, “I’ll show you how to put the baby to sleep.” She took Alexander from me and put him in the bassinet and put the bassinet on top of the dryer. Two minutes later he was sound asleep. I said “Oh great. All other kids are going to go to daycare center. I’ll have to drop him off at the laundromat. Oh, that bundle? Yeah, that one is mine.”

My wife did not laugh. As a comedian, I should have caught that. In my show, if a joke doesn’t get a laugh, I analyze what went wrong. Perhaps change the set-up, or a punch line to get the laughter back. I use laughter as a gauge of the happiness of my audience. At that time, I did not understand that it could be applied to my personal life as well. If I had understood that

laughter was a gauge of happiness, I might have saved my marriage.

As I started to research the science of happiness, I learned that when there is a genuine connection between people, laughter is the first thing that happens as a confirmation of a happy relationship.

The intimacy comes next and then people get married and live together.

When things are not working, laughter is the first thing to go.

Second thing to go is intimacy.

Third thing, is your house.

Of course, marriages and relationships break up for all sorts of reasons. But, I can say with confidence, if you're not laughing, there is trouble ahead.

So, how do you get the laughter back if you've lost it? Every relationship is different, of course, but there is one constant: 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 a dance lesson, a cooking class. Doesn't matter what you do. You just have to do it.

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, American couples sleep an average 7.2 hours a day, work 8.5 hours a day, and watch television 2.4 hours a day. Then they wanted to know how much time are we intimate with one another. They combined hugging, kissing, cuddling and lovemaking. It was 1 minute a day.

So if you're doing it for 20 minutes, you're using somebody else's minutes...and they don't roll over.

I believe that if you understand the connection between happiness and laughter, you'll be way ahead of those statistics. You will have better or even best chance to have a long, lasting happy relationship.

Just like the gas gauge in your car let's you know how much gas you have in your tank, laughter can let you know how much happiness you have in your relationship.

The goal is to live happily ever laughter. And maybe make love more than 1 minute a day.

I'm Yakov Smirnoff for Prager University.