

HOW TO MAKE YOUR RELATIONSHIP LAST

By

Gladeana McMahon

Many of us have been enjoying the television series “Desperate Wives” and perhaps have felt relieved that our relationship is healthy, happy and contented. However, perhaps the programme has also struck an uncomfortable chord with some.

When couples have been together for some time it is easy to get into bad relationship habits. Relationships need to be worked at and up-dated to ensure they do not reach their sell-by date. We see celebrity couples come and go and we seem truly surprised when a relationship lasts more than a few years – yet for our mothers and grandmothers long-term relationships were the norm.

If you want a relationship to work then you and your partner need to think about the things you have to do to give you both a chance of reaching your golden anniversary. As someone entering her 23^d year of being with the same man I know only too well the kinds of challenges that need to be faced.

By following a few simple rules you and your partner can maintain a healthy and a long-lasting relationship

Things change

There is always something new to find out about another person regardless of how long you have known each other. People change and so do the challenges we face when we are in our 20's, 30's, 40's, 50's and beyond. One big mistake is to assume that each of you continues to believe and need the same things that you always have. If you do not want to wake up one day and discover you have nothing in common, you need to keep talking about your dreams, your thoughts and how you would like life to be. Children will change your relationship and you need to plan for such changes. Do not assume that you will just automatically adjust. I have seen far too many couples who have not talked about major life events ending up surprised that their partner has not behaved as expected when the time has come.

Don't bottle things up – silence damages relationships

If you are unhappy make a point of telling your partner. Do not blame the other person but explain how you feel in clear terms. If you bottle up

your feelings you are being unfair to your partner as he or she is not a mind reader and cannot make changes without knowing what's wrong. I wish I had a pound for every time someone has said to me "he or she should have known!" You are likely to end up resenting the other person and your resentment will show itself however hard you try to hide it.

Problems do not normally go away and the sooner you deal with a problem the sooner you can move on. Some people say they do not like conflict, which is why they say nothing. However if you think about it this is a kind of false logic. It is one thing giving up a small personal preference like a particular type of cereal and another when we are talking about feelings and life events that can, in the long-term, lead relationships to break down. Would you rather have one or two major disagreements, clear the air and strengthen your relationship or erode it bit by bit till it is so weak that something very small becomes the final straw. Be brave – it will pay dividends.

You, Me and Us – get the right balance

There are three components to a relationship – a *'you'*, a *'me'* and an *'us'*. The *'you'* and *'me'* relates to the fact that you are both individuals and need to have individual activities so you have something fresh to bring to

the relationship. If you allow yourself to be taken over by another person you run the risk of becoming boring and uninteresting. Many women lose a sense of who they are because they end up being tied to the house, the children, looking after relatives and keeping their partner happy. If you do not treat yourself as an independent person your confidence will suffer and, in turn, your partner may well wonder what happened to the woman he first met. The “*us*” relates to the things you do together as a couple. In the same way that it is important to maintain your uniqueness in the relationship it is also important to make a point of looking for new activities you can both share – after all variety is the spice of life. Joint activities also provide you with common goals and reaching these together can bring you closer.

Be realistic and grateful

No one person can provide you with everything you need and if you believe this is the case you are likely to be sadly disappointed. Not only that but your unrealistic expectations are likely to harm your relationship leaving your partner feeling inadequate and frustrated and you dissatisfied with a feeling that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Women now have more choices than ever before. We can chose when we have children, we can chose to end a relationship and we can

chose to be economically independent. However, there is a dilemma about choice since although choice provides freedom it also means living with the consequences of the choice. Although our grandmothers may have had to put up with poor relationships because there was little option for a single woman with children, many of them also learned how to make a relationship work because they had to and did not have a choice. One of the keys is to recognise that if a relationship provides you with 70% of what you want you are doing well. It's an old lesson but being grateful for what you have will make you feel happier and is likely to help you maintain your relationship.

Keep Laughing

Relationships face challenges and a shared sense of humour helps you deal with life when it gets difficult. Laughing is not only an excellent stress management technique but it also helps strengthen a relationship. Laughter reminds both of you that there is more to life than the trials and tribulations you face as it helps you both forget your life-challenges if only for a short time. Laughter helps you keep perspective, which is often the first thing to go when we are troubled.

Keep an active sex life going

After a while any relationship can get a bit stale in the sex department and this is particularly true when children come along. Think of new things to try out. For example, send each other unexpected sexy text messages, emails or notes, talk about your fantasies and try making love at different times of the day. You may not have much time due to family commitments so make the time you do have as exciting as possible. A good sex life not only helps you live longer but also bonds relationships. Think about having a ‘dirty weekend’ with your partner once a month. You can do this at home if you can get a relative to take the kids and if a weekend is not possible aim for an afternoon or an evening – be inventive.

Professional Help

If your relationship is in trouble then get professional help as soon as possible. The sooner you deal with a problem the more likely it is you can recover from it. If this is the case make an appointment to see a relationship coach or couple’s counsellor.

Useful Organisations

If you need further help contact:

Association for Coaching

66 Church Street

London W7 1LB

Tel: 020 8566 2400

Email: enquiries@associationforcoaching.com

Website: www.associationforcoaching.com

BACP (British Association for Counselling and
Psychotherapy)

1 Regent Place

Rugby

Warwickshire

CV21 2PJ

Tel: 0870 443 5252

Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk

Website: www.counselling.co.uk

BABCP (British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive
Psychotherapies)

The Globe Centre

PO Box 9

Accrington

BB5 OXB

Tel: 01254 875277

Email: babcp@babcp.com

Website: www.babcp.com

RELATE

Herbert Gray College

Little Church Street

Rugby

Warwickshire

Tel: 0870 601 2121

Website: www.relate.org.uk

Recommended Reading

Love Coach, Susan Quilliam, Thorsons, £7.99

Love Is Never Enough : How Couples Can Overcome

Misunderstandings, Resolve Conflicts, and Solve Conflicts, Aaron T

Beck, Harper Collins, £8.99

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