

Thoughts on loving amidst the chaos of life

LOVE *everyday*

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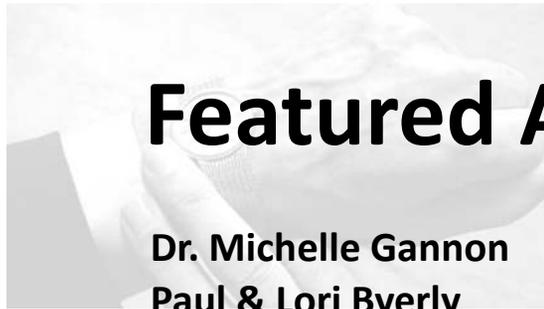
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Why Write an eBook About Love Everyday?

It started with a comment on Facebook from Chelle. "What do you think of getting a group of relationship bloggers together to write an ebook?"

That comment was about Seth Godin's *What Matters Now*. He organized a team of writers who each wrote about one idea to get the reader thinking about the new year. We thought something similar to encourage others in their relationships would be useful around Valentine's Day.

That was the start of this ebook, but, for me, the bigger "idea" started six years ago on the steps of a small castle an hour and twenty minutes north of New Orleans. It was on those steps that my beautiful wife and I exchanged our vows. I didn't know what I was getting into, I just knew that I loved this woman, and wanted to be with her. I hadn't really thought about the days after the wedding. I assumed we'd just love each other and everything would be amazing.

I don't think most people go into marriage thinking, "Man, I want this thing to last six and a half years and then move on to someone else." Most want the dream—a relationship that lasts a lifetime. **But, how do we do that?**

Love doesn't always look like walks on the beach and gazing lovingly into each others eyes. Those moments happen, but what happens the other 99.9 percent of the time? How do we do that - Love... Every day? In the wake-up-eat-breakfast-kiss-your-spouse-run-out-the-door world?

Our hope for this ebook was to assemble a team who might give some perspective on what loving someone everyday might look like. These writers are passionate about great relationships; they have the same struggles as you and me. They write about the things they have learned—or are learning—on the journey of love.

Their styles and perspectives are different, but the message is the same: **How to Love Every day, through the day to day, ups and downs and, sometimes, mundane "busyness" of life.**

-Stu Gray, aka [TheMarryBlogger](#)

With:

Chelle Stein, [It Might Be Love](#)

Dustin Riechmann, [Engaged Marriage](#)

Lori Lowe, [Life Gems](#)

Time Starved:

Why Don't We Have Time For Each Other?

Time spent together is vital to the health of a marriage. Without time together, marriages stagnate and decline; sometimes they die. This seems obvious, and yet many marriages are time starved.

Why do so many couples not have time for each other?

Usually, a lack of time together is a matter of poor planning and/or a lack of self-control. We feel bad saying no, so we say yes to far more than we should. When our commitments exceed our available time, things like sleep, family, and marriage get cheated. We are surrounded by folks who demand our time – our employers, our kids' schools and extracurricular activities, our church, our friends, and on and on. If a spouse is not vocal, he or she can move toward the bottom of the list – and if a spouse is vocal, he or she may be accused of being selfish.

Sometimes a lack of couple time is due to a desire for recognition and success. In a society that values money, job skills, and education far more than it values marriage, it is acceptable to risk or even sacrifice your marriage for a raise, a promotion, or another degree. Giving your marriage the time it needs to thrive is counter-culture, and those who do it may actually feel guilty or lazy for doing what is right!

Another killer of marriage time is children. The myriad of activities and learning available to kids today is far greater than ever before. While this seems like a great opportunity for our kids, it can easily harm our marriages.



Driving kids to and from sports, dance, band, choir, this club and that club, takes a lot of time. Don't forget the time for games, recitals, and competitions. Do a couple of events each for a couple of kids, and your marriage will be on hold for a decade or more! No wonder the divorce rate is so high in the year after the last child leaves home.

A husband or wife's hobbies, clubs, or friends can also rob a couple of needed time. It can feel selfish asking a spouse to back off on their "recreation time", and often the response to a spouse's time-stealing activities is to get one's own hobby or group – multiplying the problem.

Regardless of why a couple has insufficient time together, the solution is to set good priorities and stick to them. Put time together high enough on the priority list that it will only be shorted for a real emergency. Then stick to that as if your marriage depends on it (which it does, by the way), and fight jealously for that time.

Paul and his bride, Lori, live in Washington State. His daily [Generous Husband Tips](#) are intended to help men be better husbands.

The Alarm Clock:

Starting the Day off Right



How are you setting the direction for your day?

Be very careful how you start your morning. You are planting the seeds for what the day will hold. If you get up late, push your spouse out of the way in the bathroom, grab a cup of coffee, rush to work fuming at the idiots in traffic, and drop down exhausted at your desk at 8:10, you have set the tone for your day. Everything will seem like pressure and your best efforts will be greatly diluted.

However, if you get up leisurely after a completely restful night's sleep, you can choose a different beginning. I have not used an alarm clock for the last 25 years, because I go to bed at a reasonable time and have clearly in my mind when I want to start the next day. I get up, spend 30 minutes in meditative and devotional reading, and then go to my workout area. While working out physically, I take advantage of my extensive listening library, so that I fill that next hour with physical exertion combined with spiritual and emotional enrichment. The motivation of Earl Nightingale, Zig Ziglar, Seth Godin, Jim Collins and Chris Brogan, the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato, the theology of Rabbi Daniel Lapin, Dietrick Bonhoeffer, and John Maxwell are the first input into my brain each morning.

**“The first hour is the rudder of the day --
The Golden Hour”** Henry Ward Beecher

I never read the newspaper or turn on the TV first thing in the morning, no matter how important the news may seem. The news is filled with rape, murder, heartache, and that is not what I want in my brain. Later in the day, I can scan the news for anything related to my areas of interest and quickly sort through what I need. But I carefully protect that first hour of the day, making sure that all input is positive, clean, pure, creative and inspirational. Many of my most creative and valuable ideas have come from this protected time of the day. By 8:00 AM I'm invigorated, motivated and ready to face anything the day may bring.

At about 8:30, Joanne is up and has our morning tea and muffin prepared. We sit down and leisurely discuss our plans for the day and upcoming events on our calendars. Normally, we get in at least one game of Quiddler before I head back across the nature trail to my office.

How are you starting your day? Are you responding to an “alarm” or to your next “opportunity?”

Just remember this important thought, “The first hour is the rudder of the day.”

Dan Miller is the best-selling author of *48 Days to the Work You Love* and *No More Mondays: Fire Yourself -- and Other Revolutionary Ways to Discover Your True Calling at Work*. Visit his website 48Days.com and connect with others pursuing the work they love at 48Days.net.

The Snooze Button: Is Your Relationship On Hold?

Six times. Six times! That is how many times my husband and I ... no, not *that*. That's how many times we hit the snooze button today before we got out of bed. It was nice and warm under the covers with only *cold* and *deadlines* to meet after we gave in and got up. Nothing fun awaited, that's for sure.

But wait. **What is really fun about staying in bed?** It's pleasant and warm, but nothing gets done, and you end up bored out of sheer avoidance of life. I call that "snooze-button syndrome."

Marriage is kind of like that. If you have a conflict that arises, it is very tempting to ignore it and go about your business. Hitting the snooze button with a mantra of, "**We'll discuss it when...**" doesn't just delay conflict, it **puts your entire marriage on hold!**

During my bridal shower, guests wrote cards with "words of wisdom" on them. The overwhelming sentiment other than "Have fun with each other," was "**Never go to bed angry.**" My soon-to-be husband and I took that to heart and agreed to apply that principle to our marriage from day one.

Do we fight? Oh yes, friend, we've had some very *heated* conflicts. Occasionally, we haven't been able to solve our problems before bed, but we agreed to revisit the issue the next day, followed by a reassurance that we loved each other (**even if we didn't like each other at the time**).

Prolonging conflict is a product of **fear**, just like hitting that snooze button in the morning. We are afraid of discomfort. Now, my mantra is: "Stop dreaming. Start doing." This means **accepting the fear and approaching the situation despite it.**

To avoid hitting your marital snooze button, I have three starter tips for you:

DON'T GO TO BED ANGRY. Approach the issue before you retire. Agree to disagree temporarily, and reassure your spouse that you love him or her.

LEARN THEIR LANGUAGE. Your spouse has his or her own language. Men and women speak, think, and process differently. If you "speak their language," you may have more success coming to a favorable outcome. (Two extraordinarily helpful resources are: *For Women Only* by Shaunti Feldhahn and *For Men Only* by Shaunti and Jeff Feldhahn.)

STRENGTHEN YOUR BOND. Hold hands, touch feet or knees when you argue. The contact keeps your energy connected and keeps you aware of their physical closeness, even during difficult conversations.

If you and your spouse agree to implement these small changes (preferably during a time of peace!), you can hold each other accountable to upholding the tactics that will let you disagree without putting your marriage in danger of snooze-button syndrome!

Carrie Burgan has decided that enough is enough. It's time to "Stop Dreaming" and "Start Doing!" She helps people find inspiration and resources for taking that next step... whatever it is! Join her in taking your first step at MakeMineHappen.com.

First cup of coffee: Awaken Your Relationship

The snooze has been hit for the fifth and final time, you head to the bathroom, splash some water on your face, check your reflection in the mirror, and slowly the fog begins to lift and the day begins. The brain starts working again and then it hits you. You catch a whiff of the coffee brewing in the other room.

Ahh, a good cup of java welcomes you to another day. It provides that needed jolt to your system. Similarly, jolts can be added to your relationship each day.

There are some simple things you can do to awaken your relationship. There are some not-so-simple things to try.

The key to waking up your relationship—do something.

The greatest thing about a good cup of coffee in the morning is there are endless varieties (listed in order of caffeinated jolt level).

So what kind of coffee would you like today?

DECAF: Say "I love you" every day to your spouse. This sounds simple, and it is—but it's great to hear each day.

HAZELNUT: Take your spouse out on a date. Actually call them and ask them out. Don't assume. Take care of the babysitting. Dress nicely. Show up at the front door, and head out together. Take your time.

100% COLUMBIAN: Talk. Talk about your day, the kids, work, whatever. Just talk. Spend time listening to your spouse and sharing your thoughts and ideas along with theirs.

LIGHT ROAST: (Bet you thought this should be up higher on the list, actually this has more caffeine than dark roast). Change up your routine together. Sit at different places around the dinner table. Sleep on the other side of the bed. Small changes can provide big jolts to the system.

ESPRESSO: Keep your eyes open while kissing. Keep your eyes open during sex. Look at each other. See each other. Not just their body, their eyes, their spirit, their soul.

DOUBLE ESPRESSO: Eyes open orgasm. Connect with your eyes at the culmination of the encounter. Stay with each other after sex is over. Breathe together. Talk. Don't rush to move on to something else.

Coffee is a great addition to a morning, afternoon, or evening. Waking up a marriage is a great addition to life.

Corey Allan, Ph.D. is the editor of [Simple Marriage](#) and believes that life and marriage really are better when you keep things simple.



Behind the Wheel:

What's Steering Your Relationship?

Do you want a great relationship that will last?

Relationships need a well-defined purpose behind the wheel to steer them toward the desired goal. Both partners need to see and agree on this vision for the relationship to survive and thrive.

How many relationships wind up lost?

Imagine this: you set out on a vacation with your spouse. You decide to drive continuously to get to your goal as soon as possible. You take turns behind the wheel so one of you drives while the other naps. You do not agree on or even discuss the intended destination. However, you both have your own ideas about how you should spend your time. You don't discuss it because you both think the other already knows where you want to go. On your driving shift, you steer toward your desired destination and on their shift, your spouse steers toward where they want to go. How's this going to work out?

This is exactly the way many of us handle our relationships. We never agree on or even discuss a common purpose to work toward. We *assume* our spouse has the same goals in mind as we do. Bad idea! Often by the time you realize you both want different things, it is too late. The relationship is lost, or at the very least, severely off track!

Define a clear purpose to steer your relationship

Marriages and relationships that stand the test of time have a common goal that both partners agree to and work toward. This purpose is clear and well-defined. It is never assumed or presupposed. This ensures that both partners get what they want and expect.



Here are some steps to help you define a common purpose:

1. CLARIFY YOUR VALUES.

Identify the things that are most important to both of you. What do you value most? Is it faithfulness, kindness, availability, peace, good humor? Clarify what means the most to you individually and together. These serve as the defined boundaries for your relationship.

2. SET SOME GOALS.

Establish some common goals to work toward. Knowing where you are headed reduces the likelihood of getting lost. What do you want or need to accomplish in your relationship? Do you need to work on becoming debt-free? Do you want to spend more time together? Set some goals that will serve as your common destination.

3. LOOK FOR A HIGHER PURPOSE.

Seek a purpose for your relationship that is bigger than your individual desires. Find something that inspires you both to greater heights and moves you beyond any selfish desires. It could be faith in God or raising great children or saving the environment. It just needs to be something you are both passionate about. This higher purpose will give you longevity so your relationship will stand the test of time!

Jeff Nickles is a regular guy on a quest to live life to its fullest! He writes about his adventures at MySuperChargedLife.com. His site is full of tips, motivation and resources for finding all the best that life has to offer!

Fuel Your Relationship

What kind of relationship or marriage do you want to have? Are you being the people you want to be, and having the relationship that you really want? Fuel your relationship, and you will likely feel closer, more connected and happier together.

KNOW YOUR PARTNER'S LOVE LANGUAGE: Author [Gary Chapman](#) writes about the five main ways that we like to be loved. How do you prefer to be loved? What about your partner or other important people in your life? Commit to showing your partner love in the way *they* want to be loved, rather than the model what *you* want!

SPEND TIME TOGETHER: Set aside at least 30 minutes each day for uninterrupted, focused couples time. Commit to a weekly or monthly date night. *New York Times* reports just spending time together is not enough. You also need to spend time together around novel and different experiences. Couples participating in “exciting” date nights showed significant increases in marital satisfaction. Protect your fun, romantic time from conflicts, too. Fuel your friendship!

REDUCE NEGATIVE BARRIERS: Conflict is inevitable in long-term relationships. However, you need to be careful to not allow the conflicts to erode relationship satisfaction. Do not avoid conflict, but find productive ways to deal with differences. Guilty of using criticism, contempt, stonewalling or defensiveness? Eliminate these hostile interactions that are predictive of divorce. Repair and reconnect after an argument. Learn effective communication and conflict resolution skills. Research has found that the most popular topics that couples argue about are money, household chores, time together, sex, child rearing and in-laws. Learn healthy, productive ways to deal with conflicts together.



INCREASE POSITIVE INTERACTIONS: [Dr. John Gottman](#) has found couples are more happily married if they have the *Magic Ratio of 5:1 Positive to Negative Interactions*. For every ONE disagreement, misunderstanding or hurt feeling, they need FIVE positive, affectionate, caring or fun interactions to counter balance it. Work on increasing daily positive interactions.

INVEST IN ROMANTIC & PASSIONATE LIFE: If your romantic and passionate life used to be positive, but now has been a little neglected, pay more attention. Research by [Dr. Barry McCarthy](#) has found that if you are both happy enough with your sex life, it only accounts for 15 percent of marital satisfaction. However, if either of you is unhappy with your sex life, it can account for 85% of marital satisfaction. Commit to prioritizing your romantic and sexual life. Be more physically affectionate, too. Set aside time for sex dates, read some fun self-help sex books together, and plan romantic time away.

Invest in your relationship today for long-lasting relationship satisfaction and happiness.

Dr. Michelle Gannon is a psychologist, couples therapist and relationship expert in San Francisco and a founder of award winning [Marriage Prep 101](#) workshops for engaged, newlywed and seriously dating couples with her husband, Dr. Patrick Gannon. She writes at [Dr Michelle Gannon](#) and [Marriage Prep 101](#).

At The Office:

Working Couples And Stress



While filming the movie [LoveTalk](#), John Gray, author of [Men are from Mars](#), [Women are from Venus](#), explained the science behind what causes so many working couples to struggle with the evolving roles of men and women.

For thousands of years, men acted as the providers while women took on the role of the nurturers. Men went to work, while women took on the tasks of taking care of the home and children. Today everything is completely different and couples face a new challenge: balancing both women and men in the workplace. The woman spends most of her day at work, but when she comes home she has housework and children to tend to—resulting in a lot of pressure to take on all of the responsibilities. Women have a “never ending to-do list” and so when she finds her husband coming home after a long day of work to come home and sit on the couch to stare blankly at the TV while she has so many responsibilities to do, a lot of resentment can build up.

The biggest problem is nobody knows how to deal with this—women think that men should act more like women, and men can even attempt to adopt more of the woman’s roles, but what results is both people becoming overwhelmed and exhausted.

According to John Gray, there are three elements that men need to do to help achieve this balance between work and home—and there’s actually quite a lot of science behind it.

When women are stressed out, they cannot burn fat, which the body uses for energy and fuel. To feel less stressed, women need an abundant supply of the hormone oxytocin. Men, because of their bodies being made up of more muscle, do not have this; instead they need testosterone, which they can build up by resting and relaxing. To help couples balance work and their relationship more effectively, both people need the things that stimulate their hormones and help them achieve more with less stress.

Here are three things men can do to promote oxytocin production to reduce stress in a woman’s life so they can have more time to relax:

OFFER TO HELP: Women often feel as if they have to do everything by themselves. When you offer to help, this reduces that pressure, and she can feel as if you are her back-up system and support. This helps her oxytocin levels rise, and she feels less stress and gains more energy in order to do all the things she needs to do.

DISPLAY AFFECTION: Another way to stimulate oxytocin is through displaying affection. Hug her every chance you get— in the morning, when you leave each other, before bed. Men think if she wants a hug, she can come get one—but this does not stimulate the hormone. A woman hugging a man does not cause the man to feel more relaxed, because men do not need oxytocin; they need testosterone to relax. When you display affection to a woman, it can help her relax and gain more energy.

COMMUNICATE: Another thing that stimulates oxytocin is communication. Showing interest, asking questions, trying to understand a problem rather than solve it can all help. Men often try to solve problems as quickly as possible and then take a nap because of their testosterone—but it doesn’t work this way for women. Often, the best thing for men to do is just listen, and because her hormones are rising, she’ll feel more energy and feel better about the situation.

The answer to helping couples balance this evolving role of work and relationships all comes down to understanding the science behind managing stress. Once couples can reduce the amount of stress in their lives, they then have the energy to come up with a system that works effectively for them both.

Trudy Sargent is the producer of the movie [LoveTalk](#), a documentary on relationships to help couples understand the roles of the opposite sex. To learn more, visit [LoveTalkMovie.com](#).

Business Time

Keeping the Sexual Spark Alive

None of us ever thought it would happen—to us. Dry spells, lack of attraction, and loss of interest in sex? Those things only happen to *other* couples. Right? Then, one day, we find ourselves thinking:

Oh, for the love of God, please, please, please make him fall asleep as soon as his head hits the pillow. Please no sex tonight. Please!

Does she want to do it again? Didn't we just do it last week?

I know he better not even think about asking me to have sex, not after he left that empty beer bottle by the recliner!

Been there. You, too? Of course, otherwise you wouldn't be reading this.

And I bet you are worried that this somehow makes you abnormal. It doesn't. Sexual disinterest is incredibly common. More important, you can do something about it. First, get checked out. Make sure you are not taking a medication or have a health problem that might be interfering with your drive. If there are problems in your marriage, solve them.

After that, consider whether your sex life is suffering from one of the following turn-offs:

FATIGUE: If you have ever closed your eyes, went through the motions, and thought about taking a little nap while your partner had his or her way with you, you are suffering from fatigue. This is especially common after parenthood, when your kids sap your energy and have you up at night.

The fix: Prioritize sleep. Get in bed by 10 p.m. Get your partner to do more around the house, even if this means your partner is doing more than half. Hey, you're the one who is tired, not him or her. And once you are in the mood again, your partner will be happy he pitched in. Finally, if at all possible, have sex in the morning, when you have more energy.

MISPLACED PRIORITIES: Does sex with your partner fall to the bottom of your priorities list, right there after cleaning the house and paying the bills? You might think that infrequent sex is no big deal, but it might be a very big deal to your partner.

The fix: Talk with your partner about an ideal sexual frequency, such as once a week or once every other week. If your partner wants to have sex a lot more often than you do, compromise somewhere in the middle. And then schedule it. Make sex dates, and schedule these dates on your calendar. Do not let *anything* get in the way of these dates.

BOREDOM: If you want to have sex, but you just can't seem to get in the mood, you're probably bored.

The fix: Add a little mystery and danger to your sex life. Take turns being the sex director. One time it's you. The next time it's him. Whenever you are the director, plan out a sexcapade that takes you both to the edge. Maybe it's a little scary. Maybe it's a little spicy. Maybe it's fun. For instance, not long ago, I did a strip tease for my husband. Wow. That got me going. Another time I wrote erotica —about a housewife who meets another woman at the grocery store and ends up having sex with her—and I read it to him. You might try role-playing, props (feathers, handcuffs, massage candles, paddles), lingerie (especially lingerie that pushes your comfort zone), and sharing sexual fantasies.

BEFUDDLEMENT: Maybe he or she is a good lover, but not a great lover. Years ago, having a good lover was good enough. Now? Not so much.

The fix: Enact Project Sex 101. Read books about sex (Ian Kerner's and Pat Love's books are great) or watch educational videos (the Sinclair Institute has a wide variety). Research the matter on the Internet. Talk about what you like, and what you don't. Complete the sentence, "What I'd like more of during lovemaking is..."

Alisa Bowman is a professional writer who blogs about marriage at ProjectHappilyEverAfter.com. You can learn more about her writing credits at AlisaBowman.com.

TRAFFIC JAM:

Get Back Up to Speed

Everybody hates getting stuck in traffic. You just can't get where you are going fast enough. I learned being a commuter most my life there are some things you can do to get through it with a happy heart. For example, make a "greatest hits" CD, listen to a book on tape, observe the new makes and models on the road, and other stuff like meditating with your eyes open (one would hope!) Well, my relationship with my wife can be compared to a traffic jam sometimes, and just like a traffic jam on the highway, there's smart stuff you can do to get back "up to speed" and arrive at the places you want to be.

SHE WANTS YOUR TOUCH

Nothing stops the vehicle like neglect. Wives tell their husbands many different ways they want affection. Unfortunately, many guys don't pick up on this signal and the relationship goes nowhere for a long time. Eventually, like an old Ford up on blocks, it never starts again. Guys, make sure you touch your wife. If you do, it will keep the car rolling along and there will be fewer traffic jams to hold you up.

SHE WANTS YOU TO LISTEN

If two people are in a forest and neither is listening, is either talking? Take the time to listen to your wife's day, her hopes and dreams, and even the boring stuff like how her mother is doing. If you really want to sail through a traffic jam, ask her questions about the things she is interested in. I can almost guarantee you the results will be a sure escape from the traffic jam.



TRY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU DON'T "GET"

Misunderstanding is probably the biggest culprit of fighting in my marriage. My wife will say one thing, and I will perceive it totally wrong. This can bring the car to a dead STOP. I'm a teacher by occupation with an MA in English and yet, whenever we have these roadblocks of misunderstanding, I realize how much I have to learn. In this situation, practice active listening like: "What I am hearing you say is ..." This is called echoing, and it is a great way to keep the car out of the traffic jam. You'd be surprised what she thinks you are saying and vice-versa.

I think the common denominator in all of these suggestions is *consideration*. When you listen to your wife, you make her happy and you make her feel appreciated. I can hear the engine revving now.

TRAVEL LIGHTER

By this, I mean get a sitter. Our three kids aged 2,4, and 11 can be quite maddening 24/7. Springing for a babysitter once in a while can open up the road for you and your wife to relax and remember each other as you once were before the creatures came (just kidding about the word creature ... kind of). Try these ideas and see if they get your road cleared and your car of love cruising down the road again.

Damien Riley is an online publisher, husband and father of three. Catch up with him at www.damienriley.com.

Waiting in Line

What are you waiting for?

Are you waiting for a sign? Something to happen that tells you it's the right time?

Signs aren't always things that happen. More often than not, signs come from the things that don't happen.

What are you waiting for?

Are you waiting for permission? Someone to tell you that it's okay?

Permission from someone else is never as important as the permission that you have to give yourself first.

What are you waiting for?

Are you waiting for instruction? Something that tells you exactly how it's supposed to be?

Instructions are someone else's plan. Go with your heart, and create your own instructions along the way.



Are you waiting for tomorrow, because tomorrow is not today?

By tomorrow, everything can change.

Everything will change.

What are you waiting for?

Pat Flynn is an author, entrepreneur, business owner and blogger who values family over everything else in life. He's been able to create businesses that allow him to spend more time with his wife and their newborn son. To read more about Pat and his online adventures, please visit [The Smart Passive Income Blog](#), or say hi to him on [Facebook](#).

The Sock Drawer: How being organized helps you both

*Organizing is what you do before you do something,
so that when you do it, it's not all mixed up.*

-Winnie-the-Pooh / A.A. Milne

So often people think “being organized” makes you boring or takes lot of time to maintain. Actually, organizing can save you time, make what you do easier, give you the flexibility to grab unexpected opportunities or make a little spontaneous fun. If you have a hidden cache of gifts, when your spouse is having a down day, you are ready with a little pick-me-up gift. If you're current in your responsibilities, you can run off together for the afternoon. If your house is well-organized, there is less relational friction (no more key hunting and being late, again).

ORGANIZE ACTIVITIES – Sit down every week or two and look at your calendar together. Mark appointments, note holidays, brainstorm, look for and remove time-eaters, and plan those things that have value to you. No more missed appointments or confusion about who is where and doing what.

ORGANIZE SPACE – List the different areas of your home, and ask yourself who does what in each room. Make sure you have the items you need and the space you need to do those activities. It may mean an activity gets moved to another room, or less-used items get moved to storage.

ORGANIZE SELF – Being organized has made me a better spouse. I leave fewer messes for my husband to trip over. I'm more thoughtful and considerate when I plan ahead. I can be a help or just have fun, because I know what I have in time and resources.

HOW TO START?

As you walk through your day, write down where you see a problem. Do you bump into each other in the bathroom? Run out of computer paper? Routinely have to buy last-minute gifts for holidays?

Take each problem and brainstorm. How might you organize your time or space so that this doesn't happen again? Try your solution (if it doesn't work, try another). Ask friends how they handle it. Do a search online for organizing ideas, or read a book. It will be worth the effort as you find yourself with time well-invested, a freedom to play and less friction in your marriage relationship.

Lori Byerly is the author of [The Generous Wife](#), daily e-tips for blessing your husband.

Playtime:

How Kids Bring You Closer Together as a Couple

My husband and I have been married for four years. As a couple you get used to doing things together the way you please. We did whatever we wanted. We stayed up late. We slept in late. We spent money on ourselves, we went to movies as we felt like it, and we bought whatever we fancied. Life was easy and carefree.

Then our son was born in March, and we learned what it's like to live more simply. To buy less, to go out less often (or not at all) and to lean on each other more. We had to learn how to have a date night at home with a baby on our lap. We had to learn how to ask each other for favors when we were sleep-deprived and how to stop spending money on ourselves. We had to learn together how to live for our son and provide the best life for him.

Our son has taught us so much about what life means, and about what it means to be together. The life we're living, the purpose for which we live isn't just about ourselves anymore. It's about our son. Now, each morning we wake up for him. We both have the same purpose in life—our little boy. Every decision we make is a decision based on our son.

I know for my husband and me, our son is the light of our lives. He brings us so much joy. Being around him automatically makes us a happier people, thus happier to be around and in better moods. Our son has brought us closer together in so many different ways.



There are many activities that we do with our child that not only allow us to bond and play with our son, but that allow my husband and me to connect and spend more time together. Each activity has most definitely brought us closer together and strengthened our marriage.

Family walks are something that we love to do and have been doing for quite a while now. There are many benefits to getting outside with your spouse and children and going for a walk.

Before or after dinner, make it a daily thing. While the children burn energy and get fresh air, you and your spouse can talk about your day, the bills, the weekend or whatever. My husband and I have some of our best discussions while we walk. It's one of the only times we're together with no distractions and nothing to do but walk and talk.

Another time that has brought us closer together is during family dinners. I think having dinner as a family is so important for you and the kids. Again, it's another time when being together as a family can really strengthen your marriage.

My husband and I spend more time together now because our son has brought us together. It's a blessing for which I'm so thankful.

Samantha Mellen lives in Alaska with her husband and son (born March 2009.) She writes about motherhood and provides informative resources for parents at Mamanotes.com.

Changing the Light Bulb:

Viewing Your Relationship in New Light

Dr. Phil McGraw always says, "No matter how flat you make a pancake, it still has two sides." Whatever you think about the rest of his advice, the truth behind those words is important to remember in any relationship, especially your marriage.

Seeing things from your spouse's perspective – even when you *know* you're right – is one of the quickest and most direct routes to finding common ground. Just like your home looks different in different lights – be it the glow of dawn, the glare of the bright afternoon sun or the flicker of overhead lights in the evening – your perspectives on any issue are affected by your life experiences, beliefs and emotions.

Sometimes these things get in the way and cloud your view, giving you a distorted perspective; sometimes neither person's perspective is right or wrong. But taking the time to see someone else's perspective shows respect for their viewpoint and breaks down defenses that can get in the way of finding a resolution.

All of that is easier to accept in theory than it is to put into practice, though. It's a lot harder to actually step back and see someone else's perspective while emotions are running high and passions are ignited.

To start, take the emotion out of it. It may mean shelving a conversation until everyone has had a chance to calm down and regroup, and that's okay.



When you've calmed down, find a quiet place and think through your spouse's perspective. You could take this even farther and actually try to argue their side, which will give you an intimate look into their viewpoint.

The next time the conversation comes up, start from common ground, and share where your perspectives align before you explain where they still differ.

Seeing things from each other's perspective is not a guarantee that you'll agree. In fact, chances are pretty good that you'll still have areas where you continue to disagree even after you understand your spouse's perspective. But it does provide a foundation for growing in your relationship as you work through disagreements together rather than building a wall as you each fight to defend your own position.

Mandi Ehman is a wife and mother of four spunky little girls. She can be found blogging at [Organizing Your Way](#), where she shares tips for organizing, simplifying and decluttering.



Cleaning Up After a Mess (Apology and Forgiveness)

Do you argue? Let's face it—it's something we all do. Sometimes, no matter how hard we try, we can't keep from saying hurtful things that end up turning a disagreement into a shout-fest. We make mistakes, and in doing so hurt those we love. Although we should try to find new ways to deal with our anger, there is something you can do—assuming you are sincere.

It's Called Apologizing

A simple apology is essential to working through tough times, though there really isn't anything simple about it. An apology requires many things from us that we're sometimes too stubborn to acknowledge. We're too proud; we lack the courage to take responsibility for what WE did wrong. We're too busy pointing out what our spouse did wrong to even consider our own transgressions, which results in less time resolving conflict.

When conflict becomes negative, pause and ask yourself :

- Am I actually listening to my spouse?
- What could I have said or done differently?
- How can I help this disagreement end productively?

Apologize based on your answers: **take full responsibility for your mistakes.** Notice these questions are only focused on what you can do to make things better. Stop judging your spouse, and instead judge the person in the mirror—the only person you can change.

If you argue with your spouse until you get them to admit you're right, you haven't changed their opinion. You have more than likely just convinced them the only way out of the argument is to agree. Nothing was solved, but the conversation ends. The problem still exists.

Furthermore, when you apologize, make it count. Show that you mean it by explaining *why* you are sorry. The word sorry alone doesn't cut it. Mean it—because your sincerity will yield much better results.

There are always two sides to a story, especially during a marital dispute. It can get pretty ugly pretty quickly, and do you know what that means? There are two grown-ups who have some apologizing to do, and whenever someone needs to apologize, forgiveness comes into play.

Forgiveness and the need to apologize go hand-in-hand.

Without both, you risk the chance of harboring resentment. Resentment will destroy the strongest of marriages if left unchecked. If you should apologize and don't, the risk of resentment is very real. Resentment, like cancer, destroys everything in you wanting to make it work.

If you find that you are having trouble forgiving your spouse, resentment and anger may have reached a dangerous level. This, of course, depends on the gravity of the error. It is obviously more challenging to forgive someone when they have completely shattered your trust. For some, the next step is to visit a professional counselor.

Remember this is a team effort. You should both agree on how to deal with conflict. Take time to discuss how you will handle it, once it has crossed respectful discourse. One, if not both of you, assuming it has been discussed, will know when that moment has arrived. Remind each other about your mutually agreed-upon plan of action. It is the perfect time to take a break to gather your thoughts, look in the mirror, and return with a new focus and desire to work together. Your marriage will depend on it.

Teach yourself the lost art of apology and forgiveness, and watch your relationship grow by leaps and bounds.

Brad Chaffee created [Enemy of Debt](#) to help people become debt-free. When he is not dicing up credit cards with giant scissors, he is spending time with his wife and kids, whom he adores.

Pour on Love: How to Love Your Spouse Generously

While we can't control the amount of happiness produced, we can control the amount of love and effort poured into our relationships. Gaining a little more happiness is like gaining a little more money; you always want more. But giving and receiving love generates fulfillment. There are myriad ways to show love, but we know love when we see it, hear it, read it, and feel it. Love is in the details, the thoughtfulness, the caring.

When you act in a loving—even sacrificial—manner, you experience The Paradox of Giving. This is the secret your grandparents knew about: It is in giving that we receive. The joy and love you give returns to you. Yes, it is risky to invest yourself fully. If you have chosen your partner well, the return is often much higher than expected. A couple who focuses on the other's needs experiences joy and deep satisfaction that makes fleeting happiness look like leftover casserole—fine, but nothing to write home about.

How can you pour on love?

Voraciously study your spouse. Put as much energy into that research as in your career and hobbies. Try to understand and participate in their interests as they change over time—recreational, musical, romantic, sexual and culinary interests. Ask about your partner's hopes, preferences, desires, dislikes, and fears. Encourage their dreams. Communicate your needs and desires as well. Be the one who knows them best, and help them to know your heart. Learn new things together. Express how important he or she is to you. Have fun together. Show at least one act of kindness each day—send a short email, cook a meal, give a backrub.

Give your respect, vulnerability, time, undivided attention, intimacy, patience, fidelity, commitment and devotion. Do it without keeping score. Do it without stopping. Do it with love.

Individual freedom and personal happiness are two of the highest American ideals. The pursuit of happiness takes up most of our time and energy, while learning to be loving is perhaps an afterthought. The success of all our relationships depends on how we love.

Lori Lowe (@lorilowe on Twitter) provides marriage tips and research at LifeGems4Marriage.com. She is writing a narrative nonfiction book profiling couples who have improved their marriages through adversity. She lives in Indianapolis with her husband and two children.





Grocery Shopping: Feeding Your Relationship

Most people wouldn't think that grocery shopping or the foods you buy have much impact on your relationship. While you don't hear much about an apple a day keeping the divorce attorney away, eating the right food can give you more energy, feel less stressed, and even improve intimacy. The wrong foods can result in weight gain, stress, lack of energy, decreased libido, and a number of other physical and emotional effects that can strain your relationship. Think about it:

When you're in a bad mood, have no energy, and feel sick, how loving do you feel towards your partner?

Everything we eat affects our body and our mind. Foods high in sugar for example change our blood glucose level, which can cause sugar cravings, energy crashes, and crankiness as our body fights to get it back in check. Our brains depend on fat to function properly, but most of us don't get enough "good fat" - only lots of bad hydrogenated fat that is bad for your brain and your heart. Our body also depends on many different vitamins and minerals to perform at its best, which most of us are lacking.

All of us *know* we should try to eat healthier—but that's not always what we *do*. Temptation is everywhere, and to make it even more difficult, we don't always get the support we need to make healthy food choices. It's not uncommon for one partner wanting to make the change for a healthier and happier lifestyle, while the other partner may not.

Making the transformation to eat healthier for your body and your marriage has to start with you. Many people think it is their partner who needs to change—but if you change yourself to be who you want to be, your partner usually catches up on their own, without the nagging, fighting, or guilt. My husband hated me starting a diet—today he finally eats the same way I do.

Here are some ideas to help you eat healthier and grow closer together at the same time:

- 1. GO TO A NEW STORE:** There's no rule stating you need to go to the same store every week. Go on an adventure! If your relationship is stuck in the same routine, doing the same thing isn't going to change anything! A farmer's market or specialty shop might just be the ticket.
- 2. TAKE A BREAK:** Getting a quick coffee or juice together before shopping is a great way for two busy people to take a break and talk.
- 3. LEAVE THE KIDS AT HOME:** Make it a "productive date" rather than another chore or errand. You'll be less rushed and more focused, too.
- 4. MAKE IT SENSUAL:** Grocery shopping is full of tastes, sights, and smells. Stop to smell the produce, taste samples, and enjoy it.
- 5. COOK TOGETHER:** After you have everything and are back at home, try cooking dinner together for a change. If your cooking skills aren't the greatest, consider taking a class together to learn something new.

Where can you start if you want to eat healthier? It's not as hard as it seems. Often just eating fruits and veggies at every meal and switching to organic and preservative-free foods can make a huge difference. You may want to look into finding out if there are foods that are making you sick, such as common allergens like wheat, milk, and soy. I was shocked to find out after years of eating these foods with "no problems", I'm actually sensitive to all of them. Go for variety, make it fun— before you know it you might just lose those extra pounds, and you'll definitely feel great.

If you want to have a better relationship, you've got to take care of yourself. Marriage is between the mind, body, and souls of two people. Take care of your bodies, and the rest often naturally falls into place. A healthier and happier relationship might be no farther than your local grocery store.

Chelle Stein is a mom of three kids and married to the funniest guy in the world. When she's not sharing relationship advice at ItMightBeLove.com, she's trying new foods and perfecting her diet at LoseFree.com.

Dinner Time

Dinner is what prevented me from turning a single funeral into a double funeral.

It started when I changed my mind and decided we ought to attend my uncle's burial. The funeral service had just ended, and we were in our car with the intention of going home.

"I think it would mean a lot to my dad if we went," I told my husband. He had looked pretty broken up in there. "No way," he replied.

I couldn't *completely* blame him. The temperature outside was well below freezing, a foot of snow had piled up on the ground and snowflakes were still falling. And we didn't know the man. My uncle had spent the last eleven years in prison. To say we weren't close to him would be an understatement.

"I don't think I should have to attend the burial of someone I wasn't close to," he argued.

"It's not for my uncle, but for my dad," I insisted. "We go to funerals for the sake of the bereaved." "I'm not going," he said.

To say that I was angry would be another understatement. I was furious. The selfishness!

We continued to fight as all the other cars in the parking lot began to leave. I told him he was selfish and had no sense of familial duty. He told me I was being unreasonable, wasting his time. Finally, we pulled out behind the caravan of cars on their way to the cemetery. We yelled back and forth the whole way there. He didn't understand! No, I didn't understand! Finally, we arrived. We shivered violently as we watched my uncle's ten siblings shovel scoops of dirt onto his lowered coffin. We got back into our car and left for home.

Back at home, we were still angry, but it was dinner time. I decided to julienne a couple of sweet potatoes and put them in the oven with smoked sausage. I tossed together some salad greens with a homemade vinaigrette and toasted pine nuts.



Smelling the cooking food, he came in and set the table in silence. Half an hour later, we sat down at the table with dinner and a cold Rickard's Red between us to share. We didn't say another word about the funeral.

Finally, he sighed. **"It's hard to stay mad when you have so much good food in you."**

I think my husband spoke a great truth. I wasn't mad anymore either. Food is powerful. Sharing a meal unites. Food is more than a source of nourishment: it is the means of fellowship.

There's a reason every culture on the planet celebrates important events with feasting, why Christians call the sharing of bread and wine "communion." The sharing of food is special – to some, even sacred.

When two or more people eat together, they admit they are both human and need to sustain their bodies with food. They must lay down their defenses and admit their shared vulnerability.

My husband and I didn't resolve our argument that night, but we stopped being angry at each other over dinner. I resolved not to arrange for a second funeral. Tonight.

So this is my advice to you: share meals with the people you love. Do it every day. Don't go your separate ways when it's time to fill your stomachs. Sit across from one another and savor the meal. As my husband pointed out, it's hard to stay mad when you have good food in you.

Kathleen Quiring blogs and philosophizes about marriage at [Project M: Musings on Love, Marriage, and the Madness that Ensues](#).

Dish Duty: Sharing Responsibility

I've talked with women from around the world in our chatrooms and many of them say the same thing when I ask why they spend so much time there. Here's a recent story told by a 37 year old woman in California:

"I'm a mother, a wife and a working woman, so my life is really busy. I get up early, get the kids breakfast and off to school and then I dash to my job. I love my job but I work on my feet a lot so I do get tired by the end of the day. After work I hurry to the supermarket to pick up a few things for dinner. While dinner cooks, I start the kids on homework and start the laundry. My husband comes home just in time to eat. I love dinner time because I'm able to enjoy my family.

After dinner my husband watches the news and I clean the kitchen, check homework and do more laundry. I feed the dog, clean out the bird's cage and get lunch organized for the next day. Soon it's bath and bedtime for the kids. After tuck-ins and kisses goodnight, I clean up the bathroom and head back to the laundry. I take a quick walk with the dog and then it's about 9pm and I'm ready to relax.

Where's my husband during all of this? Sound asleep in his chair in front of the TV. I've had a long day, I'm tired and I would love someone to talk to—someone who values my opinions and makes me feel desirable. I don't get it at home. I don't know how to get it at home. We have sex on Saturday night at 10:30pm.

I've asked and pleaded for more attention from him and all I get is, "You have to tell me what to do, I can't dream it up. If you want me to empty the trash, just say so."

Honestly, I don't care he doesn't want to help me around the house, I'm used to that and I can cope, but what I can't cope with is the loneliness I feel. I want to know I'm still important to him. I'm not and that makes me sad. We don't argue, we get along okay and the kids are doing well in school and are happy.

I found that going to a chatroom takes my frustration away. Is it cheating on my husband? Maybe, but he doesn't seem to care. By the time I've finished all the chores he's always asleep in his chair. I see my friends in chat nearly every night. When I log on they ask me how my day has been or did anything important happen today. I get a chance to talk out my problems with someone who cares. It may be all virtual but it feels real to me."



I remember asking my mother what she considered sexy in a man. I'll never forget it.

"The sexiest man in the world is the one who's loading the dishwasher because that tells me that we're in this together."

Sure, it's not always the man in the relationship who doesn't put 50% of the work to keep a relationship strong. Where a husband and wife are really in it together, you won't see either the husband or the wife spending night after night chatting online to friends they've never met.

Maureen Shaw met her husband online back in 1994 when she lived in Florida and he lived in Australia. They took their product knowledge and created SexyAds.com. Maureen shares her experience at FeelingFlirty.com.

Pocket Change:

Using Money to Enhance Your Relationship

Clink. Clank. Clunk. What is the best way to use the extra change rattling in your pocket?

Rather than wasting it on useless extras or losing it in your sofa cushions, you can improve your relationship by saving it for a common goal with these 5 easy steps.

STEP 1: CHOOSE A GOAL: First, you and your spouse need to agree on a common savings goal. This will help your relationship by giving you a common purpose. Some saving goal ideas include:

- Spiritual** – Something to help your marriage flourish spiritually
- Personal Library** – This will help you and your children learn
- Vacation** – A frugal holiday can provide great bonding time
- Product Upgrade** – Get the new version of a tool you both love
- Family Visit** – A vacation with your extended family
- Favorite Cause** – Donating money can be an excellent goal
- Healthy Food** – A healthier lifestyle to improve your relationship
- Repair** – Fixing and maintaining your belongings is very satisfying

Whatever goal you choose, make sure that it is one you both support whole-heartedly.

STEP 2: RESEARCH THE COST: Now that you have chosen your goal, it is time to research the cost. Once you know the monetary price of your goal, you will know how to evaluate your progress.



STEP 3: START SAVING: Using a simple jar, start saving your spare change. To make this system work, follow these two rules:

Rule #1 – Use cash as often as possible. This will help you avoid credit card debt while generating more loose change.

Rule #2 – Never use your spare change for anything but your goal.

As long as these two rules are followed carefully, you will be surprised how quickly your jar fills.

STEP 4: EMPTY THE JAR: Once your jar fills, put the money into a savings account at the bank. Although you can put this money into your normal savings account, you must write down the amount of money so you know how much is in your “Pocket Change Fund”.

STEP 5: SPEND AND REPEAT: Once you have met your savings goal, reward yourself by purchasing the thing you were saving for. The biggest reward of this saving plan is not the goal – although that is good also. The most important benefit is the relationship improvement gained through working together. Now that your first goal is completed, it is time to repeat the process. Pick another goal and start saving again.

Nate Desmond is the author of [Practical Manliness](#), a blog dedicated to reviving the dying flame of masculinity by applying historical ideals to modern men.

Checkbook Balance: Stop Fighting Over Money

I'll say right from the start that I am by no means an expert in relationships. What I am, however, is awesome at not getting into fights or heated arguments when it comes to my wife and money. The reason for this is simple - we have a system in place! A system that's spelled out what all the rules are, and one we've both agreed to 100%.

The trick of it all is **knowing** your other half.

Does he/she enjoy working with money? Is he/she super independent or a do-it-all-together type of person? You guys know each other more than your parents do, so this shouldn't be hard. Unless, of course, you're financial virgins - in which case add a little spice and "reward" each other for every one of these "getting-to-know you" questions answered correctly! It might take a bit longer to understand where your snook'ems is coming from, but you'll have a lot of fun in the process.

Once you're on the same page, determine WHO will be in charge of WHAT. For us, only one person likes dealing with the money (moi) - so I'm in charge of tracking it all and giving my beautiful wife regulatory updates. That may not be the case with you, but that's okay. If one of you likes "balancing the checkbook", and the other enjoys investing in stocks, then divide and conquer baby! As long as you're playing off each other's strengths, and everyone agrees, you'll be cheering for each other in no time.



I also think it's important that both parties have their own "do whatever I damn well please with" accounts ;)

This is separate from the "house" and "important stuff" funds, and completely off limits from judgment or questioning. It's up to you how much goes in there every month, but I like to think it symbolizes a little trust and a little freedom. **Trust** that your other half won't bother you about it, and **freedom** to spend it on whatever you wish! Even if it's \$200 purses or an endless supply of baseball cards. You work hard supporting that family of yours, the least you can do is allow yourself some unaccounted-for play money.

And that's it! The secrets of the financially happy couple. It's dumbed down a bit, but it really is about workin' **together** and getting on that same financial page. Once the game plan's in action, just do your job and keep each other in the loop! Then continue loving each other like crazy...or until you drive each other crazy... ;)

J. Money blogs at Budgets Are Sexy.com, a personal finance site trying to change the image of financial education ;) Contrary to popular belief, money talk CAN be fun! Hit up his [V.I.P. Newsletter](#) for more.

What's On TV? Television and Relationships



There's a dent in our couch. Looking directly at the couch, it's the last cushion on the right. Near the arm rest. This is the preferred spot for my, or my Beautiful Wife's™ butt while we watch TV.

As I was thinking about my part of this ebook, I said to myself - "Stu—because that is what I call myself—Stu, you could write about television and marriage by pairing popular TV shows with aspects of marriage like...

'You could be *The Biggest Loser* if you don't spend time with your spouse,' or 'You're going to be *Fired* if you can't figure out how to budget together, because money is a big fight-causer in relationships,' or 'Watching *Cake Boss* might inspire you to take up a hobby together' or 'Take *24* hours and dedicate that time to your spouse,' or 'What *American Idols* are you putting in front of your relationship? Work, friends, another person, porn, alcohol, etc?'

Or, Stu, you could talk about dents."

Dents happen when you sit on the couch in the same room with one another, but you aren't really spending time together. You are sharing space, your butts are making dents, but the only thing your minds are doing are getting filled with is the gobbledy-gook that Simon, The Donald, Kiefer, or the latest *Bachelor* are shoveling in there.

The dents you make with your butt cheeks don't do anything to help your marriage, really. What has changed for the better at the end of the night if you have spent two hours on the *Biggest Loser*, one hour on *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* and, of course, the six and ten o'clock news? Nothing. Nada. Mainly, you have frittered the night away. (Cool. I actually used the word frittered.)

To be honest, this is *my* struggle. I get comfy in my dent. I cuddle up with the chips n' salsa, kick off the shoes and throw the feet up on the ottoman. But, wouldn't you know, it just feels empty at the end of the night? Like I wasted away a whole evening when we could have done something together. For each other—for our family—or the world!

What other dents could we make in our marriage?

- Dents in our floors:** Take dance lessons together or redesign your home together.
- Dents in our communities:** Make a difference in an organization you can support.
- Dents in time spent with our kids:** They desire our attention much more than the TV.
- Dents in our finances:** I'll leave budgeting and dollars and cents to another writer—but still, we could make a dent there don't you think?
- Dents in our health:** Walk or run together, bike together, go to the gym together.
- Dents in our communication:** Turn off the tube and learn something about your mate.
- Dents in our sex life:** Enough said.

I know. There is a time and place for everything—if you have been making huge dents in your marriage and the world, take the night off, and make a dent in your couch.

But for the rest of us, we need to give the silver box on our wall a rest. I'd write more, but *24* is on.

When Stu Gray isn't making a dent in his couch, he likes to encourage couples to have Stupendous Marriages. He does that mainly at his website: TheMarryBlogger.com but he's also been known to talk about marriage at special events, church groups and conferences.

Logging On



I'm sitting here in my bedroom during our daughter's 13th birthday party, hiding from the throng of teenagers who are tearing through the house. My husband is already in bed, reading.

After 17 years together, we are still a happy couple, and moments together like this are not infrequent. In fact, I'd say that the quality of our relationship is something that our friends frequently notice. They are all the more shocked when they find out that the Internet plays a significant role in our life as a couple.

"What? You email each other all the time?" Apparently there is some manual out there – although I haven't seen it yet – that says communication in good relationships must take place only face-to-face, and with greeting cards, like Valentine's cards. Oops. My husband hasn't sent me a Valentine's card in ages. But occasionally, he sends me a link to a [New Yorker cartoon he knows I'll love](#). There's something delicious about knowing that he's just looked at the same cartoon, half way across the city, a few minutes before I open my email, and laughed at exactly the same thing I'm laughing at.

Really, a good relationship is a good relationship. Who cares whether you talk on the phone, text, send letters by snail mail or spend 24/7 in the same house? So much of the communication that goes on between a couple is a mysterious undercurrent that will flow no matter what.

A good friend of mine did a significant portion of her courting while watching the Colbert Report at the same time as her almost-boyfriend, both of them sending comments about the show via Yahoo Messenger. It still warms my heart remembering their spirited, intelligent banter, my friend's delighted shrieks at some witty bon mot he typed out, her fingers flying furiously in response, a big grin on her face. Oh, now I remember: they had met online, too, at ClubZone. I am totally in love with their little 3-year-old.

They, like my husband and I, have common interests. Indeed, when my husband and I first met, computers and the budding Internet were something we had a lot of fun discussing. I remember talking about what bulletin boards we were frequenting online and thinking it awesome that we had one or two in common. It seemed like some unknown magical bond had already brought us together without us knowing it – all the more remarkable because otherwise we had no friends in common and had been traveling in completely different social circles.

That's what young couples do, no? Everything is significant, everything is magical. The Internet is no exception.

Now that we're an "old" couple, the Internet still plays a big role. You can often see us sitting side by side, typing away on our laptops, taking quiet satisfaction in the fact that we both like it. Occasionally, one of us will raise our head and make a comment, maybe, "Have you read [Genkaku's latest post](#)?" (a Buddhist writer we both admire), or my husband, an avid blogger himself, will ask me whether I'd like a guest post on a topic that fits my blog better than his.

The ebb and flow of communication between a married couple is as old as the sea. The Internet is just a new little blip, easily embraced, I believe, by the wide ocean of give and take between two people who have decided to spend their lives together.

My husband has turned his light off and is almost asleep now. When I'm done sending this article off, I'll play another move in our [Lexulous game](#). He keeps clobbering me but I just keep going back for more. I just love how his mind works.

Isabella Mori (@moritherapy on Twitter) lives in Vancouver, Canada. She likes to help people by listening to them and sharing tools and stories with them so that they can make their lives better. She blogs at [Change Therapy](#) and has been a counselor for 19 years. In terms of relationships, she was a slow learner but is glad that 17 years ago she finally found the right man – Glenn, musician, accountant and online poker enthusiast.

Evening Rituals: 10 Ideas to Get You Going

When you get home from work, or when the children are finally in bed, what do you do? Do you light candles, sit back and soak in a warm bath? Or do you fire up the laptop and pound away on the keys until the wee hours of the morning?

So many of us choose the latter and as a result our health, mental well-being and relationships suffer. There are many things we can do at the end of each day to relax, unwind and take care of ourselves, without a lot of time or effort.

HERE ARE SOME EVENING RITUAL IDEAS TO GET STARTED:

1. WALK. Just getting outside to get some fresh air can be extremely relaxing. You'll burn some pent up energy and loosen up your body, which is great if you've been sitting in an office all day. **Reconnecting tip:** Walk with your spouse, pull kids in a wagon or even let them set the pace. Pets love it, too!

2. READ. Turn off all distractions and just sit in a nice comfy chair and read. It can be a new book or your favorite magazine. Be quiet. Be still. Focus your attention on something other than work. **Reconnecting tip:** Lay on the couch together or set out some cushions or blankets on the floor. While you're not entirely engaging with your spouse you are still spending quiet quality time.

3. TALK. With work and running after kids all day it's easy to feel out of sync and disconnected from each other. Talk to each other and find out what they've been up to, what their plans are for the week, and what, if anything, do you or they want to get out into the open? **Reconnecting tip:** Make a date with your spouse to catch up. Discuss your hopes, dreams, and thoughts for the future.

4. PLAY A GAME. Be it a board game or just a quick hand of cards, playing a game can be fun and brings you together as a family. **Reconnecting tip:** Make up your own game by putting questions in a hat and take turns answering them.

5. SOAK IN THE TUB. Lay back and surround yourself with bubbles, a cup of hot tea, your favorite wine or warm milk, and just enjoy the solitude. **Reconnecting tip:** Draw a bath for your spouse with everything ready for them.

6. WATCH A MOVIE. I am very much an advocate for turning off the TV. Occasionally, however, watching a movie to relax and calm your mind after a stressful day is just what the doctor ordered. **Reconnecting tip:** Choose a movie you both enjoy. Dim the lights and cuddle, give foot rubs or neck massages.

7. GO TO THE GYM. Going to the gym is not for everybody but it is another good way to burn off some excess energy, relieve tension and work out your frustrations from the day. **Reconnecting tip:** Take a class together with your spouse or meet up for a stretch session. It will bring you closer together as a couple and keep you motivated.

8. GET ARTISTIC. Draw, paint, write or sculpt. Do something you find relaxing, therapeutic even, and do a little bit each night before you go to bed. **Reconnecting tip:** If you draw but your partner doesn't, consider teaching them.

9. PRACTICE GRATITUDE. Take a couple minutes at the end of each day to reflect on what you were grateful for. List 5 things that you were truly grateful for on a piece of paper or in a dedicated journal. **Reconnecting tip:** Share what you're grateful for with your spouse. It may provide more insight into the person they really are.

10. ESTABLISH A ROUTINE. Get a head start on the day ahead by preparing the night before. Make your lunch, shower, pack your bags, layout your clothes, and set the coffee pot. Doing most of these things before you go to bed may make for a better night's sleep since you know everything is accounted for. **Reconnecting tip:** Do this together or take turns getting each other's stuff ready to go.

Through trial and error, you'll find what rituals works best for you. The common theme of all of these is to disconnect from work and reconnect with your family or friends. Start today and experiment - your perfect evening ritual is out there.

This article was written by Sherri Kruger. Sherri is co-founder and chief editor of [Zen Family Habits](#) and also founder of [Serene Journey](#), a site dedicated to sharing simple tips to enjoy life.

Putting the Kids to Bed:

Balancing Kid Needs and Adult Needs

It's time for bed, the kids need to be bathed and tucked in, and the adults need time for themselves and as lovers. As a couple who want to keep the love light burning bright, how can a couple balance the needs of their children with their needs as individuals and life-long lovers? How can spouses find balance in a world that has almost unending demands?

To love EVERY DAY, a couple needs to take steps to help balance their adult needs with the needs of their family.

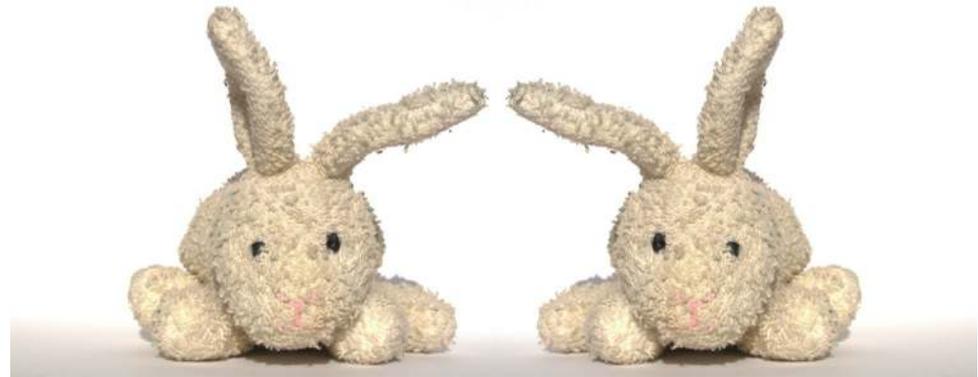
First, prioritize and simplify personal, marital and family commitments. Sit down together and determine your values (what is important to both of you), your goals (what you'd like to do or work toward), and how to contribute towards them with a proactive approach. Lists are one easy way to prioritize, and "the four quadrants" method can really help!

Separate each item on the commitments list into: Urgent and Important (my e-book article is due in an hour); Important but Not Urgent (I need to prepare a webinar for next month); Urgent but Not Important (my library books need to be returned today); Not Important and Not Urgent (play Farmville on Facebook).

From the list, separate them into a list for personal, one for your marriage, and one for family...and then **drop one thing from each list.**

Another way to simplify is to set limits—there is a limit to time and energy, so find balance by establishing a limit. Dear Hubby and I have seven children who naturally all want to be in extracurricular activities. We set the limit at one activity per child. Drop things from the to-do list that aren't absolutely essential.

After priorities have been identified, and life has been simplified, it's time to create a schedule and make time for each aspect of life. Actually carve out time and schedule personal time, partner time, and family time in that order.



Personal time can be a time for each person to pursue their hobbies and take care of himself or herself! Partner time can be a set amount of quiet time to be together to catch up, hold hands, and reconnect. Partner time is just as vital as a meeting or projects at work, so if you are scheduled to be together, don't reschedule it. Finally, find time for the family—for both their activities and to give undivided attention to each child.

The final step is to take the time to enhance non-sexual intimacy and stoke the fires of love. Treat your partner as your best friend. Respect them as an individual. Be patient. Exercise some manners and be courteous. Make them feel special. Share yourself openly. Celebrate life together and LAUGH! Listen to what they say. Doing these things to enhance non-sexual intimacy will be a giant step forward to enhancing sexual intimacy...and, BOY, it is vital to maintain a physical relationship—in big ways and small.

A fulfilling sex life is KEY to balancing the stresses of personal, professional, and family life and is one area that couples often put aside because they are "too tired." Do not fall into this trap. You make the effort for work and for your children, and it is vital to make the effort for your marriage. Run away together, and leave the kids at home. It will teach the children that the loving marriage relationship between a husband and a wife is just as important as the relationship with them.

Cindy Taylor is an infidelity expert living happily in the Pacific Northwest with her Dear Hubby and their seven children. As a marriage coach and the founder of AffairCare.com to help both loyal and disloyal spouses recover after an affair.



Pillow Talk:

Romance Through Words

When it comes to the most important relationship in your life, don't be normal. **Normal sucks.**

Unfortunately, in many relationships, "normal" represents a life of mediocrity and going through the motions. It is simply too easy to succumb to the busyness of life and lose sight of how precious our spouse or significant other really is to us.

And it is even easier for our partner to feel disconnected and a bit underappreciated. We know how we feel, and (if asked), we are quick to tell others that our spouse is a clear number one on our priority list...

But does your partner know how you feel?

TELL THEM. It may sound trite. It may seem overly simplistic. But clear communication is THE KEY to a healthy and extraordinary relationship. When you think a kind thought about your spouse, let them know how you feel. Take the time to listen to them about their day, and respond with some exuberance or empathy. Show them you care by telling them you care. These are the little things that make us all feel appreciated and affirmed in the face of a crazy life.

WRITE IT DOWN. Talking is good, but writing is great. To leave a really meaningful and lasting impact on your partner's heart, take a few minutes to write them a romantic love letter. This doesn't have to be some cheesy Hallmark spiel about angels and achy, breaky hearts... though it could be. And it really shouldn't be difficult.

Here are five simple steps to write an awesome letter that your significant other will cherish for life:

- 1. RELAX.** There's no pressure. Simple and heartfelt is the way to go.
- 2. REFLECT.** Think back, and write around a simple theme...favorite memories during the past year, the story of your first date or why you fell in love with them and why today they are even better...
- 3. ROUGH IT.** Just write out some phrases, let your creativity flow.
- 4. WRITE IT.** Handwritten is best. Typed out will work, especially with some cool paper to add a little personalization.
- 5. RECITE.** Read your letter aloud to your partner. Or have it delivered in a cool and memorable way.

JUST DO IT. Simple, huh? All it takes is a few minutes to create a sweet little letter that expresses the feelings you usually don't take the time to consider or (especially) to deliver. With just a small effort, you have the ability to rock your relationship and make your significant other feel as special as they truly should feel.

It is time. Take the motivation you feel right now, and start to jot down your thoughts. Follow through with a **heartfelt romantic letter**, and deliver in an awesome way. You and your spouse will be so glad that you did.

The best "pillow talk" doesn't have to take place in bed, although I bet it will make the time you spend there more enjoyable.

Dustin Riechmann is a 30-year-old father of two (almost three) living a crazy life that he loves. He created [Engaged Marriage](#) with the mission of helping people achieve the extraordinary in marriage and in life. Writing stuff like this helps him to do a little better job of this, too. You can also follow him on [Facebook](#).

Let's Go Out: Dates to Bring You Closer Together

Date Night: those two words bring a smile to my face.

It means that my wife, Alisa, and I get to go out without the kids. Dinner, uninterrupted conversation, and then a walk, drive, or movie at home. If you're like us, you probably spend a lot of time going back and forth trying to figure out where to eat and what to do, so much so that the joy of a date night is lost.

It took us awhile, but we realized that we needed something different. So we implemented "Take the Lead" on our date nights. It's not difficult—it just means that either Alisa or I plan out the entire date night. When you Take the Lead, you release your spouse from having to decide anything. It becomes an opportunity for them to just be spoiled by you. This becomes such a welcome change, because, let's face it, both husbands and wives are constantly making decisions all day long. We become mentally exhausted. Taking the Lead is a throwback to the early days of your relationship when one of you would plan a romantic evening, down to the very last detail...just because!

Here are some ideas to help you Take the Lead on your next date night:

*Choose the restaurant, and make reservations.

*If you know what your spouse likes, preorder and have appetizers or dinner ready when you arrive.

*Plan the date's activity—a movie, a walk in the park, a drive.

Things you can do on a date night:

1. Museum/Gallery
2. Zoo/Wild Animal Park
3. Have lunch/dinner at a park.
4. Go for a long drive.
5. Take a walk on the beach.
6. Hike/backpack together.
7. Sit by a lake, a pond, a creek.
8. Play a board game together.
9. Watch a movie.
10. Think outside the box.

Date night is a special time for the two of you to reconnect, to focus on your relationship. Remember that you should never stop courting your spouse, wooing them, making them feel special. Take the Lead, and be in the moment with the most special person in your life.

Tony & Alisa DiLorenzo blog (and podcast) about marriage at OneExtraordinaryMarriage.com.

Sunday School: Finding the Spirit in Your Relationships

“Going to church doesn't make you a spiritual person any more than standing in a garage makes you a car.” I love that saying, but what in the world does that have to do with marriage?

What if we approached our relationship the way many approach their spiritual relationship with God – with a ‘checklist’ mentality that might look something like this:

- Attend Sunday School (check)
- Give money – minimum 10% mandatory (check)
- Wear the proper church attire (check)
- Carry a Bible (check)
- Say a prayer (check)

“There – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 – DONE! What a fine spiritual person I am.”

Now, let's apply this to marriage:

- Wear my wedding ring (check)
- Don't cheat on my spouse (check)
- Say 'I love you' (check)
- Have sex on a 'regular' basis (check??)
- Keep the in-laws at bay (check)

We would all probably look at those lists and think, “That's absurd. No one would do that.” It seems silly because it's so obvious, but sometimes we all need to break from our daily routines and look as if each of these relationships are sacred—because, they are.

Wearing a wedding ring and following a to-do list doesn't constitute a meaningful marriage relationship any more than showing up at a building on a particular day (Sunday) and going through the rituals ensures you'll enjoy the richness of a spiritual relationship with God. In fact, it will pretty much guarantee the opposite in both scenarios - **resentment over time and an empty relationship based on obligation.**

Knowing God, or your higher power, is so personal, so unique, no one can define it. To some, it is experienced in silence; others through song or dance. To one, awareness comes through suffering; to another through the gift of life. This is the unnamable power of Love, of the universal **spirit** that gives us life—individually and collectively.

This is the power of the deepest love, the unique spiritual connection that allows a man and a woman to experience life beyond **doing** or **feeling**—but in knowing. When pain is too deep, joy beyond words, and the one person who knows you so well holds you so close your hearts beat as one, this is spirit. When the body begins to weaken, you know that the love you share is never gone, because spirit never dies. This is the *essence* a spiritual relationship.

Just as a relationship with God evolves through different forms of expression—noticing beautiful details of the world, truly observing the infinite blessings we each have, saying “thank you,” spending time together in prayer and meditation, or coming together with like-minded people, a spiritual relationship with our spouse is formed the very same way—through intention, appreciation, awareness and communication. Pretty awesome!

But just so there's no confusion, this doesn't mean you shouldn't remember her birthday, or tell her she's pretty, or watch the Super Bowl with him, give him an extended back rub, say I love you...

Denée King is the founder of SheJustGotMarried.com, an online resale boutique for buying & selling gently used wedding accessories as well as a social community that celebrates the joy of love and dedicated to Discovering You After 'I do'.

Now what?

Life is full of crazy ups and downs, challenges and victories. We hope this ebook will start getting you on track to live the life you want—and deserve.

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Pass this book along to everyone you know—because we believe that anyone who's ever been in a relationship—or will be in a relationship—can find some useful information here. Post it on Twitter or Facebook, or send the link in an email to a friend. We made this ebook free simply because we want everyone to read it. If you can pass it along for us, we'd greatly appreciate it.

Want to get in touch? You can contact the editors by sending a message [here](#).

And, most of all, remember: find little ways to show someone you love them, every day.

