

KEYS TO SUCCESS IN MARRIAGE

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Every starry eyed couple that tie the knot to begin their marital journey soon realizes that merely the fire of passion and romance in their heart is not enough to live happily ever after. In fact, it may sound shocking for you to hear that most separations and even divorce occur during the first few years after the wedding! Neither a long courtship nor even living together is a guarantee for success in marriage. Several couples who were so madly in love while courting turn bitter with anger and resentment several years into their marriage. Where did the love go? There are yet other couples whose relationship seemed to grow from strength to strength, their marriages vibrant and brimming with an unspoken togetherness. So what is it that sets a good marriage apart from one that has turned stale and sour? Is it love? Is it luck? Or is just plain and simple commitment in marriage? Is there some magic formula for success in marriage?

We are well aware that yes, indeed, there are some key ingredients that go into making marriages a wholesome, lasting and satisfying experience. Money, status, good lifestyle, sex and romance are not the real reasons behind why people stay happily married. They are only the peripherals, the 'add ons'. At the core of every lasting, happily married couple relationship, is just a sheer sense of responsibility to stay that way.

Good or bad marriages don't happen by chance. Nor can you bank on your love for each other to see you through the years. Something more needs to be done if you have to sustain the rewards of love – and this is primarily your responsibility. You have to be an active participant in the quest for a loving and lasting relationship. Marriages are not static. They grow and change and may decline. Here are a few pointers from couples in happy marriages –

- **Acceptance of your mate**

You need to pay more than lip service when you say that you understand your spouse. True understanding is born out of a deep desire to know the essence of your partner's personality. It includes learning about each other's likes, dislikes, wishes, hopes, needs, dreams etc. Once you know and understand your partner deeply there is an appreciation of the similarities between both of you and a respect for the differences.

- **Prioritize the relationship**

Powerful attraction and overwhelming feelings of love are what initially brought you together. But somehow they seem to fade away as other priorities take over – demanding careers, hyper energetic children, elderly parents, social commitments – you name it. Juggling with such conflicting interests you might end up placing your marital relationship on the back burner. You must ensure that despite all these other responsibilities, you first owe a responsibility to give each other special time.
- **Redefining boundaries**

Once you are married, you and your partner form a unique sub-unit of the larger family – whether joint or nuclear. Your relationship with your family of origin will now be changed in many subtle ways. You must realize you are separate and must be able to draw a boundary around yourselves as a unit. You must move along the path from attachment to a separate entity that is able to function independent of the larger family, yet rooted in it.
- **Positive engagement**

Well documented research from John Gottman's 'LoveLab' in the U.S., has highlighted the value of positive interactions that 'strengthen the friendship that is at the heart of any marriage'. Gottman explains after studying thousands of hours of videotaped couple interactions, that by interacting positively with each other, couples get into less conflict situations with other and are able to communicate far more effectively. If the partners feel positively towards each other they will be able to resolve their resolvable conflicts and will be also able to accept what can't be resolved between them better.
- **Complementarity**

There are many stages in passages of marital life that requires the partners to function in their respective roles in a complementary manner. You and your partner need to supplement and complement each other in discharging various roles and responsibilities in the marriage that require a good, mutual understanding. Domestic chores, bringing up children, running errands, managing finances, income generation, caring for old or ill parents are some of the important areas that calls for good role functioning. You and your partner need to be in consonance with each other about what your

respective role functions are and how to divide the responsibilities in an equal and realistic manner

- **Give up control**

True love is unselfish and does not seek to control. The more you are domineering in your attitude towards your spouse, the further away you drive him or her from you. Nobody wants to be controlled and pushed over in what is supposed to be an equal relationship. Make sure you do not impose your preferences, choices, beliefs on your partner. She or he has a right to be her/his own person, be free to think and act in ways that reflects his or her personal identity.

- **Respect your partner**

Studies on successfully lasting marriages have found that a key ingredient is respect for one's partner. This includes a healthy appreciation of your differences and agreeing to disagree. Respect demands that you treat your partner politely, with courteousness. It means to hold the other person in esteem. In good marriages, partners nurture each others self-esteem. They will not stoop to ridicule or treat their partner with contempt. Their criticisms are constructive and never unfair, or that attacks the integrity of their partner.

There are many other ingredients that go in to making marriages happy and successful: open and honest communication, adjusting expectations realistically, resolving conflicts through negotiation, enhancing intimate experiences, and sexual compatibility. These issues have more often been dealt with and talked about than those mentioned above. A proactive approach to addressing these vital issues is far better than waiting till the relationship shows signs of stress and strain.

The ultimate resilience of your marriage is determined by how much you are willing to invest in its success. Love alone is not enough to ensure a wonderful marriage. It requires commitment and some hard work that will certainly enhance the quality of your marital life. Above all, you must realize that a successful marriage is greater than the sum of its parts—it's all about two people who help each other to get on with life by a helping, caring attitude. Everything else falls into place thereafter.