

Creating a happy marriage is possible and this site is dedicated to providing resources to help couples who want to stay together. By providing information about qualified marriage counseling, we hope to encourage couples to get the help they need. The site also features articles, other websites, books, and workshops which offer the tools needed to create happy, lasting marriages.



The 10 Best Decisions a Couple Can Make

This is Episode number 29 of Stay Happily Married, "The 10 Best Decisions a Couple Can Make."

Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

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- Lee Rosen: Hi. I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I'm here by telephone with Bill and Pam Farrel who I'm sure many of our listeners will know of from their numerous best sellers. My favorite title is *Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti*. They have another one, *Got Teens?* And they're latest book, the book we're going to talk about today, *The 10 Best Decisions a Couple Can Make*. I'm really excited that you all were able to join us today. Thanks so much for being here.
- Pam Farrel: Thanks. It's great to be here.
- Bill Farrel: Thanks, Lee. It's a pleasure to join you.
- Lee Rosen: You're really celebrities of the relationship advice world and we're thrilled to have you. You've been married now, if I recall correctly, it's more than 25 years, right?
- Bill Farrel: It'll be 29 years this December.
- Lee Rosen: Okay. Which is -- today's standards that's practically a miracle. And you have three kids. How old are your kids now? They're all grown, yes?

Pam Farrel: Pretty close. Our oldest is a coach and he's 24 and happily married for three years now and his precious wife brought us our new granddaughter this year.

Bill Farrel: Yeah.

Lee Rosen: Oh, congratulations.

Pam Farrel: And then our middle son, he is a senior in college and just put a down payment on an engagement ring, so any day now we're waiting for the big proposal.

Lee Rosen: Wow.

Pam Farrel: And then our youngest son is a senior in high school.

Lee Rosen: Okay. So one left to get on through college it sounds like.

Bill Farrel: Yep.

Lee Rosen: Now, did your oldest child -- the married child -- read your book?

Pam Farrel: He has gone to a lot of our seminars and conferences and, yes, as some of the education that he got, he actually did reports in classes on it because he wanted to defend marriage as the institution in some of his classes. So, yeah, he read some of our books for school and then one of our books, *Single Men Are Like Waffles, Single Women Are Like Spaghetti*, we have all of our guys read and reward them the first year in college with a gas card. "Hey, finish this book and you can have gas for your car."

Bill Farrel: It is a hard time reading the sex chapters because it's just too weird.

Pam Farrel: Yeah. We let them out of that one.

Lee Rosen: But for the price of gas today, that's a lot of motivation.

Pam Farrel: That's right.

Lee Rosen: So I'm they'll read whatever you put in front of them. Well, now, I'm curious, this book, *The 10 Best Decisions a Couple Can Make*, and subtitled "Bring out the Best in Your Relationship," what prompted you to do this? I'm sure it took a tremendous amount of time and energy. What was inside of you that needed to come out in the form of this book?

Bill Farrel: Well, we learned pretty early on in working with couples that emotions tend to run relationships. People get emotionally upset with each other and people find ways to get out of sync with each other emotionally. And we figured out that what brings emotional energy back into line are the decisions that a couple makes. And so we saw a lot of couples in turmoil because they didn't know how to make decisions together.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Bill Farrel: And so we wanted to get the message out that the quality of a relationship is really based on the decisions you make together.

Lee Rosen: Right. We're all the sum of all of our decisions. And you've really -- I guess you found the 10 decisions that really determine the whole direction of your marriage. I mean, when I flip through and look at each of the 10 it really is everything.

Pam Farrel: We did try to boil it down to what we saw as the key pivotal issues in a couple's life. Because we have spent so many years working with couples and many of them in trouble, in trials, we've seen what things they really need to know. Basics sometimes, like deciding that love lasts. I mean, just the decision that, yes, we will hang in there and we will make this thing work. That's a huge decision sometimes because feelings don't feel like hanging in there.

Or deciding to be positive, complimenting instead of criticizing, deciding to be a good communicator. And so that means a lot of times you can't communicate the same way you were raised; you need some new skills. So some of them are pretty basic but we try to be really creative in the way we teach couples, and pretty humorous in the way we teach new skills to couples.

Lee Rosen: Now, how do you find couples using your book? Do they use it together or how does it most commonly get put to work?

Pam Farrel: *10 Decisions a Couple Can Make* is nice because it has discussion questions in the back, so it works really well to read the chapter together. Sometimes the couples do that when they travel in the car; they keep it in their glove compartment. Sometimes they decide to do it in bed -- they read a little bit every night in bed. And then there are dinner and dialogue questions in the back where they can go out once a week and they can talk about what they're learning, and that helps them then apply all the principles.

Bill Farrel: And the most common way we see couples using it is they will take turns reading it to each other so that they get the shared experience

of the information. And they get to laugh together and they get to ask questions together.

And the second most common way we see is people getting together with friendship circles where two or three couples will get together and they'll discuss what they read that week so they can interact with one another.

Lee Rosen: It really suits itself to that.

Pam Farrel: It does. And also one of the big decisions we encourage couples to make is to get a mentor couple. And so we have "mentor moment" questions in the back too so you can look for a couple that's a little bit older, a little bit wiser, a little bit further down on the life path than you are, and you can take the book to them and say, "Can we learn from you?" And get together for dinner once a week and then the mentor couple can help lead the young couple.

Lee Rosen: What I love about the whole format of *10 Best Decisions a Couple Can Make*, each chapter is one of the 10 decisions. And it really is easy to sort of pick up and read one chapter at a time without feeling like you need to rush to the next one. It really works in terms of kind of thinking about and talking about that particular topic. So it really -- I think the ideas that you've just mentioned are -- this book is just perfect for the way people are using it. That's terrific.

Bill Farrel: Lee, thank you for sharing that because one of the things we try to do in all of our books is to keep it male-friendly because often when we talk about marriage the message that men get is you can have a good marriage if you become a little bit more like a woman.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Bill Farrel: And I don't know of a man on earth that has that on a goal sheet. "I want to be a little bit more like a woman." What men want to do is they want to be men but they want to have successful relationships. And as men, we tend to deal with life in bite-sized pieces. And we try to write our books that way so you can deal with one thing at a time so that men can succeed better.

Lee Rosen: Right. So the reason I like it is apparently it was designed for me. You've been in my brain. Right.

Now, one of the chapters, the second chapter, is about deciding to be positive. And it seems like this whole idea of being positive is a theme that really runs throughout the book. And what I'm wondering is, how can couples best maintain a positive outlook or

attitude? Not just generally, but how can they do it really when things are difficult, when there's conflict, when times are tough? How do you stay positive? What's your advice?

Pam Farrel:

There's a couple of things that help couples decide to be positive. If each individual makes that decision themselves, that will help, because no matter what, if one person in a marriage decides to be positive it will cause forward movement on that relationship. And one of the things -- it will always cause forward movement in that person's life. When you take the high road and you decide to focus on your spouse's positive attributes and compliment instead of criticize, sometimes it totally changes the atmosphere of the home.

There's a study out that says that happily married couples have five positive statements for every one negative statement. And that sounds like so over the top, "You mean, I'm supposed to be complimenting all the time?" Yeah. That's really what helps. That's what works. And what we've found is it kind of gets contagious. If one person says, "Okay, I don't feel like doing it today but I'm going to choose to do it. I'm just going to choose to make a list of the things that are good."

Like one woman I worked with, she was like, "Well, I can't really think of anything."

And I sent her home to brainstorm a list. She came back. I said, "Just try to find one thing. Just start with just one positive thing."

And so she came back and she was like, "Okay, I thought of something."

I'm like, "What is it?"

She's like, "He's still here."

I'm like, "Okay. Let's run with that." And she and I just brainstormed together all the positive ways she could say, "You're here, buddy," but in a nice way.

And so she'd see him sitting there in his Lazy Boy and she'd walk up and she'd say, "It's so nice to have you around." She'd see him sitting there in his Lazy Boy watching ESPN again or reading the newspaper and she'd just walk up and touch his shoulder and she'd say, "It's so nice to know that some things in life never change."

And an amazing thing happened. He got up out of that Lazy Boy chair and he began to do romantic gestures for his wife. And some

of those romantic things have ended up in our books. And so she learned the secret of taking 100 percent of your energy and putting it one positive thing.

Lee Rosen: Right. And it is infectious. It does make a difference. Now, something that -- you're telling a funny story and I want people to know that this book is really filled with funny stories. And of course I opened the book and the first chapter I read was called "Decide to Keep the Sex Sizzling." It was actually chapter six but for some reason I started there.

Bill Farrel: It has the same number of letters as "one," so it works.

Lee Rosen: Right. Same thing, just different. Right. And I get to the end of the chapter and I'm not going to give the joke away, but absolutely hysterical joke. And it seems like you really work a lot of jokes in and a lot of really funny stories. And do you feel like sense of humor -- is that a big part of making a marriage work? Do you have to keep your sense of humor?

Pam Farrel: You know, one of the things we did for *10 Best Decisions Every Couple Can Make* is we surveyed couples that had been happily married for over 20 years and we asked them, "What's the secret to your success?" And number two on the list was have a good sense of humor. It's important that we take our vows seriously but not ourselves so seriously.

Bill Farrel: And Lee, one of the realities of marriage is that there is no perfect marriage. And I think we live in a day and age where we think it's supposed to be good all the time. And one of the ways that a couple can keep a realistic view is to just keep laughing about life because we're never going to get it all right and we're never going to get it perfect; we're all going to make mistakes. But all that is part of the journey. So if you learn to laugh at life and laugh at yourself, it tends to take the pressure off the relationship.

Lee Rosen: Well, you make it easy to find the humor in relationships. You guys have done a great job of keeping it light and keeping it funny even though you're dealing with some pretty serious topics here.

Now, one of the things you talk about in the book is that after a few years of being married most couples I think end up with mostly married friends. Couples end up with couples. I've certainly found that to be the case in my life. Almost all of our friends are married couples. Is that a good thing? Is there an issue with that? Is that helpful? Does that work for us? How does that play out?

Bill Farrel: Well, it's a very natural part of being married because once you get married and you start to have a family it really deeply impacts your life. And so it gets hard to spend time with people who are single because singles have a very different lifestyle. So it's very good for the relationship to have married friends because it keeps your perspective clear. When you hear other people in their struggles you go, "Oh, maybe we're normal." Or you hear people in their successes and you go, "We've been there too." And when you hear people tell stories about the next stage of life you go, "Okay, they made it through. We can do this." So it is very healthy on the relationship.

I think from a societal point of view we all need to be intentional about having some single friends because so much of our society is becoming single now and a lot of those single people are parents. So their kids are going to interact with our kids. So we do need to be intentional because it's not easy to go out and make single friends when you're married because your social setting tends to be married people.

Pam Farrel: And that's one thing a healthy, happy couple can do is model that for single parents kids. Those single parent kids -- I was one of them, saw my parents go through a traumatic divorce. And so for me, when Bill and I got married, we went hunting for mentors because I needed to see what healthy and happy looks like because that's not what was modeled for me. And so it's a gift that we can give, especially to those kids that are being raised by single parents. And sometimes we can hold out hope to our friends that are single too that marriage is a good thing. Maybe they've been hurt as well.

The danger comes in that sometimes when couples are married and they're going through a traumatic stage of life -- we talk about different transitions that the typical couple goes through -- the danger sometimes can be then they quit communicating as a couple and one of them or both of them start hanging out with their single friends and the single lifestyle looks more attractive because it doesn't have responsibility at the level they're at. And that can put a marriage in danger.

Bill Farrel: Or the single friends are hurting because they have come out of a relationship and so they're attitude is, "Well, leave the bum."

Lee Rosen: Right.

Pam Farrel: "All men are bad," yeah. And so we just have to guard our hearts.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Have to consider where it's coming from and what they're going through when they're giving that advice. Right.

Bill Farrel: And the other thing people need to know is that a couple that's in crisis, the ones that hang in there together five years after the crisis starts, they say that they're happier than they've ever been together. So there really is power in hanging in there because it deepens the relationship. So a couple should be very, very, very slow at considering ever getting out of their relationship.

Lee Rosen: We should be happy that we're having a tough time. It's all going to work out.

Pam Farrel: And get good advice from counselors and good legal advice. That's really important in all those stages where you might be going through trauma. And the thing that is most important for couples to know about when they're going through a hard time is it's really common. In *10 Best Decisions a Couple Can Make*, "Tackling the Typical Transitions," we walk couples through from the time they're newlyweds all the way until when they are aging together well past retirement. What are all those typical transitions?

And learning about those transitions ahead of time and knowing that, "Oh, there's a transition for women in mid-life? Didn't know about that one." "There's a transition for men in mid-life? Oh, that's what it looks like? That's what he's going through?" "Oh, there's a parenting transition that can be hard?" So knowing about those things and how to handle them will help minimize the trauma.

Lee Rosen: Speaking of trauma, I have a teenager and an almost teenager. And as experts in the field what I'm wondering is do you think that having children makes a marriage stronger or does that make it harder for couples to make the marriage work?

Bill Farrel: I think that children make the relationship more intense and if you handle it well, it makes the relationship better. If you handle it poorly, it makes the relationship worse.

Pam Farrel: That's really why we wrote *10 Best Decisions a Parent Can Make*. We wrote another book that goes along with this couple book on parenting.

Lee Rosen: Okay.

Pam Farrel: And the reason why we wrote that is because we saw so many people fighting over the way they're raising their kids that it was putting their marriage at risk. And so just by getting on the same page parenting it will help your marriage as well. It's not probably a

wise idea that if the marriage is at risk, "Oh, let's have a baby to save --"

Bill Farrel: Yeah. That'll solve it.

Lee Rosen: Yeah.

Pam Farrel: Let's add all those hormones and put the family budget at stress. That doesn't help. You should go for marriage counseling first and then have the baby.

Bill Farrel: And there is nobody on earth we care about more than our kids; that's just the way it is. And so if you're on the same page with your spouse in raising your kids, it's one of the greatest and deepest experiences on earth. But if you're not on the same page or -- like you have teenagers. Parents have to change when their kids become teenagers because we go from telling them what to do to helping them make decisions. It's a very different role. If you handle that transition well the teen years can be a great few years in your life. If you keep trying to tell your kids what to do rather than teach them how to make decisions, it can be a four-year or six-year war in your house.

Lee Rosen: Right. Yeah. You hear about that a lot from a lot of couples.

One other thing I want to ask you about while I've got you is -- obviously I think everybody's on the same page, that marriage is not easy; you have to work at it. Does it make sense to take sort of prophylactic measures? Obviously reading your book is smart. Should people be doing things like going to seminars, workshops, talking to counselors? Should we be trying to immunize ourselves from failure in our marriages?

Pam Farrel: Yes, definitely. That's why being proactive -- chapter one we talk about how important it is to set a plan for how are you going to stay in love? Set up those date nights in your schedule first before all your other responsibilities; we encourage weekly date nights. Go to conferences ahead of time. Just like you take your car in to be tuned up, take your marriage in to be tuned up before it's in trauma. Get that mentor in place. Be in a small group, fellowship, friendship circle that studies marriage and you encourage each other to stay in there together.

In one of the chapters we walk a couple through how to write a marriage mission statement and how to come up with a marriage motto and a family crest. It's like a moniker; just like if you go to a private school or if you're part of the military there's little symbols

that mean things. And I you can do that as a couple, go to that deeper level and figure out what is the purpose, "Why are we together?" Together there's a reason why we are going to impact the world and make it a better place.

Bill Farrel: The way I like to describe it to people, Lee, is we live near a number of military bases. And I tell people all the time, if I took you today down to one of the jets that they fly out of the bases and I put you in the driver seat and I said, "Fly this plane," if you don't know how to fly you're going to be instantly overwhelmed. But if you go through the training to learn how to fly and you keep your skills up, you get to go on the ride of your life. And marriage is the same way.

We have a lot of people sitting in the cockpit of the marriage, they don't know what to do, and they're overwhelmed. But if you commit to training and every year you get a little bit more training, your marriage can be the ride of your life.

Lee Rosen: The ride of your life. I love that. That is a fantastic way to wrap this thing up.

Let me ask you, to get a copy of your book I know about your website at FarrelCommunications.com. Is that the best place to find your book or would we be better of going somewhere else?

Pam Farrel: That's a fast, easy place to find the book and if couples want us to sign it -- a lot of couples decide to give it as wedding presents.

Lee Rosen: A great wedding present.

Pam Farrel: And so we sign it for couples, often times. But it's available at any of the traditional book stores, Barnes & Noble, Amazon.

Lee Rosen: Amazon, all the big names.

Well, thank you so much for joining us. You guys really -- obviously with -- what did you say, it's 28 or 29 years -- 29 years of marriage.

Bill Farrel: Going on 29.

Lee Rosen: Three kids, all three nearly grown, one married. Obviously they've learned a lot from you about relationships, kid number two with the engagement ring ready to pop the question; probably do it before we get this podcast out. That's very exciting. And obviously you've got it working right and your kids have learned and you're helping all of us by making your good advice available. And I love that you're heading us in the direction of working with other couples and

mentors and groups and it just sounds like a really positive plan to keep us on the right track and keep us all making our marriages work. So thank you so much for spending time with us today.

Bill Farrel: Thank you very much, Lee.

Lee Rosen: I'd like to thank Bill and Pam Farrel for joining us to discuss their book *The 10 Best Decisions a Couple Can Make*. You can find more information about Bill and Pam's other books and this book at their website, FarrelCommunications.com. I will of course put a link in the show notes at StayHappilyMarried.com to Farrel Communications. And obviously you can find the book at Borders, Barnes & Noble, Amazon.com, all the major book chains. But I love the idea of buying the book as a wedding gift or even as a gift for yourselves and your marriage and having them autograph it. That's pretty neat that they'll do that through their website. So I would really suggest that you check this out. I think you will find it helpful and obviously they are true experts in making marriage work.

Thank you so much for listening today. I hope you will join us again next week. We would love to hear your feedback. Give us a call on the listener comment line at (919) 256-3083, or shoot us an e-mail at comments@stayhappilymarried.com. Let us know how we're doing, give us some ideas for topics; we would love to hear from you.

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

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