

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.



Getting Your Husband to do What You Want

This is Episode number 51 of Stay Happily Married, "Getting Your Husband to do What You Want."

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

Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at Rosen.com.

Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I have on the telephone from Durham, North Carolina Dr. Tina Lepage. Tina is the founder of Lepage Associates and she specializes in personal and professional relationship issues, children and adolescents and family counseling. Tina is a licensed psychologist with a master's degree and a doctorate in clinical psychology. And just by way of background, she's married -- I think that's always a good thing for Stay Happily Married, to have the guest have succeeded in marriage -- and she has a 4-year-old daughter.

Tina, welcome to the show.

Tina Lepage: Thanks, Lee. It's nice to be here.

Lee Rosen: Well, I'm really glad to have you back. I know we've done a number of these together and today I feel a little bit like I'm giving aid to the enemy with this topic "Getting Your Husband to do What You Want." I hope I don't get guys writing me nasty e-mails for giving away the --

Tina Lepage: Giving away the secret, huh?

Lee Rosen: -- the secrets. Yeah. Exactly. But I am really curious. I want to see what it is you people think you need to do to get --

Tina Lepage: "Us" people being us women, not me as a psychologist.

Lee Rosen: Well, you know, you're the expert of you people, I guess. The woman, the wife, who not only wants what she wants and wants us to do it but also knows the tricks to how to get it done. So let me ask you right off the bat, do you think guys are -- are we more resistant to cooperation? Are we more resistant to being told what to do?

Tina Lepage: I think that there are personalities among both men and women that are more resistant than other types of personalities to doing what they're asked, so to speak. So gender's not the only factor there.

There probably is a socialization component where women tend to be more socialized to be relationship-focused. And relationship-focused tends to mean cooperation, getting along with others, give and take with others, that type of thing.

And men are more socialized into this type of masculinity that has more to do with being in control and being self-sufficient and that type of thing. So to that extent you might see some differences in men who, if they feel like they're being "told what to do" that they might buck against that a little bit.

And it also has a lot to do with how you were raised. There are a lot of parents out there that raised men that are very cooperative and I think that probably serves them really well in their marriages.

Lee Rosen: And I guess if we're not raised to be cooperative eventually you mold us and bend us, right?

Tina Lepage: We try. We try.

Lee Rosen: I hear wives talk about a "well-trained" husband.

Tina Lepage: Yeah.

Lee Rosen: Well, when you're counseling couples what are some of the things that you frequently see husbands really putting up a fight about?

Tina Lepage: You know, people still come in talking about and arguing a lot about household chores and I think that that's just because of the persistence of the need. It's sort of a daily and a weekly thing that has to be taken care of. And so while it can sound like a small issue - - it's just the menial daily tasks -- it ends up being a big argument because it's who's going to do what when and who's going to do how much?

The other thing that tends to come up also is the whole issue of women wanting their husbands to be more romantic and to spend more time chatting about their day with them. So those two things - the chores and the romance, time together chatting -- those probably come up the most in terms of things that wives feel like husbands sort of buck against.

And then there's also probably a third area of social obligations, the wife wanting to do stuff with in-laws or friends or family or whoever and the husband maybe not wanting to do that as much.

Lee Rosen: So you're going to make us talk to our wives, go visit our in-laws, and do chores.

Tina Lepage: Well, that's the goal, yeah.

Lee Rosen: If I'm a guy -- I've already hit the "pause" button if I'm a guy listening to this show. But, no, I guess we need to know what you people are up to. So that's good. I just am feeling my hands in the dishes, probably washing the dishes at my in-laws' house. It's just like, "How did this happen to me?" While talking about my day.

Tina Lepage: Oh, gosh. I don't think we'll go that far. Maybe not doing the dishes at the in-laws' house but --

Lee Rosen: We are in -- okay. But seriously, these little things -- and I think those are relatively small sorts of conflicts. I know they drive people crazy, but do those things sometimes lead to bigger issues in the marriage? Do they lead to getting things out of control?

Tina Lepage: Well, they do. And that's often one of the things that we see in couples therapy when people come in is that these things that are "small" issues, for one, if they persist over time then they become a bigger issue. The husband can feel nagged or unappreciated for the stuff that he does do. The wife feels like she's being ignored and maybe overworked if she feels like she's having to do stuff and if he's not pitching in. And basically they become unhappy with each other. There's emotional distance between the two of them and that actually makes them less able to deal with bigger problems that come along if there's some emotional distance there.

And also sometimes people ascribe bigger meaning to these littler things. So not being romantic enough, for example, can maybe mean to the wife, okay, you're not as interested in me anymore. And so then that is a bigger issue if she worries her husband isn't interested in her. Or just in general if the husband isn't doing stuff

she asks, she might feel that that means he doesn't respect her as an equal. And then that becomes a bigger issue even though it was maybe started by something small.

Lee Rosen: Oh, boy.

Tina Lepage: And you say that and that really points out that oftentimes that's not the case. And that's what happens when the couple gets in an argument and the wife says, "You don't respect me as an equal," or "you don't love me anymore." And the husband is thinking, "What is she talking about? I just don't want to do the dishes and --"

Lee Rosen: Right.

Tina Lepage: Yeah. So --

Lee Rosen: Yeah. It's just landmines of loves, yeah. Okay. So is there a pattern? Are there progressions that you see, a pattern of progressions that you see couples going through as we get into this situation?

Tina Lepage: Yeah. And I think that -- hopefully for couples who are married over time, they develop a healthy pattern of how to go through these sort of negotiations of asking one another for things that you want in the marriage, because there certainly can also be an unhealthy pattern of how to go through it.

But some of the healthy patterns that people can progress through is that -- you know, when you're asking for stuff there might be a little bit of initial head-butting but over time you come to some sort of mutually agreeable decisions. And sometimes that means that the person who was doing the asking just gets what they want and the other person says, "Okay. I'll give you this one. I'll do this even if it's not something I really want to do." Sometimes it just means the person who's asking listens to their partner's response and actually changes what they ask and says, "Okay. Well, I don't actually need you to do that," or "we can adjust a little bit what I was asking for." Those are sort of healthy ways to go through it.

Some couples trade stuff, which trading can be fun as long as you approach it with the right attitude. Trading is sort of, okay, you are asking for this; I'll do that if you do this and --

Lee Rosen: Oh, a little trading. Right.

Tina Lepage: Yeah. Trading is good.

Lee Rosen: That sounds like something that happens.

Tina Lepage: Well, you just have to be careful with trading that it doesn't turn into a, "I'll only do something if you have something you can give me back," because then that doesn't feel good to the couple. But, you know, couples who have a healthy pattern can have fun with that. Those are probably the healthy patterns.

The unhealthy pattern is probably what you might think. They sort of both stay stuck in their positions. There's no compromise. There's no creative brainstorming. There's no giving in just to make the spouse happy. And then they end up dissatisfied with each other.

And one other thing I think is important to mention is just because your spouse gets quiet about something doesn't mean it ended well. So I always encourage spouses that if something ended and it doesn't seem like there was any resolution, it just stopped being talked about, that you actually check in with your spouse because that's a potential landmine.

Lee Rosen: Because it disappeared and you don't know what's really going on there.

Tina Lepage: Right. Yeah.

Lee Rosen: It just dropped off the radar screen.

Tina Lepage: If something was an issue and all of a sudden somebody just stopped talking about it but there was no resolution between the two of you, then sometimes that means that they've given up, they're really unhappy with it, they're just sort of -- they're not talking about it anymore but they're still upset about it.

Lee Rosen: I think you should put an article on your website to explain the currency of this trading thing. If I do this many dishes, what do I get? You could standardize it.

Tina Lepage: Sure. And trading can be an exact, "I'll do this if you do that." It can also be a larger system. Like I have a system in my marriage -- my husband will be thrilled that I'm sharing this publicly, I'm sure. I'm much more comfortable with public stuff than he is.

Lee Rosen: I know your husband and I'm sure you have him wrapped around your finger and he does exactly what you want.

Tina Lepage: If only. Yeah, I wish. But it can also be a larger sort of system. Like what tends to work for us is that it's very easy for me to give up lots

of what I consider little things. So I can let a lot of things go his way as long as when it comes to something that I see as like a really big, important thing to me that I sort of get my way, let's say. So we sort of trade -- and he loves this because his care is just in the opposite. He doesn't want us to have to talk about every little thing. He's rather just give up the big things so that we don't have to have a million discussions about the little things. So this system works for us; for other people it wouldn't work. But again, so we sort of trade on a bigger level.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, and that's the key, I guess. If your system works for you then you're golden.

Tina Lepage: Absolutely.

Lee Rosen: Then, next thing you know, you've been married 50 years and you're not running off with a woman in the nursing home.

Tina Lepage: Right.

Lee Rosen: Okay. Let me ask you this. I think probably I do this and I wonder if others do. Do we sometimes resist doing what our spouse wants not because we don't really want to do it but because there's some other issue in our lives? That really we're resisting A because we're annoyed about B, that sort of thing?

Tina Lepage: Sure. Yeah. I think that absolutely happens in marriages. And I think the important thing is if that's happening to talk to your spouse about it. It's probably not -- you know, it doesn't fall in the area of the really healthy patterns that you want to be in. So if you feel that happening and you know that you're saying no to one thing just because you're annoyed about something else, then that means that something else hasn't really been completely worked through between the two of you.

So at that point it would be a good idea to talk about that so that either you can work out a way so that you feel like you have say in both areas and you're not still upset about that other area, or if you mention it to your spouse they might even agree with you and say, "Well, yeah, you really did give more in that area so I'd be willing to let this one go."

Lee Rosen: One thing that I've noticed -- I've been married I guess 18 years, so I've sort of -- at least begun to figure things out at my house. We're at the tip of the iceberg. But one thing that I figured out early on is that my wife, anyway -- and I'm curious to know if this goes on in a larger scale -- but she initially would not say, "I want you to do the

dishes" or "I want you to put out the garbage." She would say, "The garbage needs to go out;" or she would say, "The dishwasher is empty," implying that it needs to be filled.

And I would just say, "Look, if you want me to take out the garbage, just tell me what you want," because I would like -- she would then be aggravated when I didn't pick up on this "the dishwasher is empty" thing. Does that happen a lot?

Tina Lepage: It does. I mean, some of that is gender differences. Women will tend to use more subtle language sometimes and we feel like we're being polite when we say it that way. We might feel like saying -- "Take out the garbage" sounds rude or pushy whereas just pointing out that the garbage is full again -- and that relationship focus that the other person will then say, "Oh, okay. I'll take it out."

Lee Rosen: Yeah. No. You're right it is full.

Tina Lepage: And the husband is sort of saying, "The garbage needs to be emptied." "Okay. Thanks for sharing. Maybe you can do it." You know?

Lee Rosen: Right. Are your feet broken? What?

Tina Lepage: Right. But part of that is what you're pointing out there, is noticing your partner's communication pattern. You see the communication pattern, what she uses, and you can either just see that and then follow through, or you can do like you did and suggest to her that she communicate differently with you in a way that you would respond better to.

Lee Rosen: Right. Now, let me ask you this. I've got teenagers -- two teenagers -- so it's like crazy chaos nightmare at my house most of the time. But one thing that's clear to me -- and I guess it's been clear even before they were teenagers -- is that they do a lot of limit testing. They want to find out where the edges are. How serious are we about enforcing this rule? When spouses are not cooperating is it always a sign of a problem or is it somehow something like what the teenagers are doing? Is it somehow like limit testing?

Tina Lepage: Yeah. It can certainly be that. And not all limit testing is bad. In other words, if your spouse asks you to do something, some things that we ask our spouses to do are important to us. Other things are small things that aren't that important to us; we're just sort of asking in passing. And so it certainly doesn't hurt to limit test and to figure out whether this is something that's really important to

your spouse, if it's something you don't want to do because it might not be important to them.

If it's something you don't mind doing I always say to people just do it because that builds really positive currency in the relationship. So if your spouse asks you to do something that you don't mind doing, just say yes and do it immediately and you're sort of building that positive currency for later, which is good to have in the marriage.

There is sometimes the more aggressive, unhealthy limit testing where a person just almost always says no just to say it and see where it goes. And if that's going on in the relationship, that person would probably want to work on that and not be just testing the limits just for the heck of it.

Lee Rosen: Right. That makes sense. So getting down to sort of the meat and potatoes of this whole thing about how do you really get your husband to do what you want, what are the things that you suggest couples -- what are the first steps that you suggest that they take to improve cooperation and to help husbands -- or wives, I guess -- stop resisting those things that they don't want to do?

Tina Lepage: Yeah. I think it's important to think about both when you're the one asking and how you react when you're the one being asked. Because we talk about the title of sort of wives getting their husbands to do what they want, but also part of that is being somebody who when your husband asks you to do something that you're willing to be somebody who pitches in and does what you're asked to do as well, because it won't feel good to either person if it feels unbalanced. So it's important to look at yourself in sort of both positions.

When you're in the position of being the asker -- whether you're the husband or wife -- there are some things you can do to make it go well. Sort of plan a time and a setting that's most positive in which to ask somebody. So you try and do it when people are in a good mood, when you have time to talk. Sort of use nice, cushioning language. Be polite. All of those things that just make general communication better.

And I think it's important to be really open to hearing what your spouse has to say back and to potentially compromising. If your spouse feels like you always ask from the role of, "I'm just here to talk you into saying yes," then they're less likely to really listen. So be willing to try compromises, to try stuff out to see if there's something different that might meet your need.

The flipside, which is somewhat similar, but when you're being asked, to really listen calmly and to really listen. Because sometimes if you immediately think, "I don't want to do that," you stop listening and you're just waiting for your chance to say no. And so to really listen to your spouse, hear why it's important to them, try and empathize with why it's important to them; and the same stuff about using nice language, explaining how you feel, being open to compromise, all that kind of stuff.

I guess the last thing I would say in both positions is to sort of pick your battles. If something is really important to your spouse and less important to you, then let them sort of win on this one so that, again, it feels equal to the partners over time. The most important thing is not how every single conversation goes but that in the big picture of being married that the spouses feel like it's a pretty equal give and take.

Lee Rosen: So let me ask you, are we going to need to do another show that is "How to Get Your Wife to do What You Want"? Or -- no, seriously. Or is this really -- the title is "How to Get Your Husband to do What You Want," but is it really specific to one spouse or do the rules pretty much apply in both directions?

Tina Lepage: I think for the most part it really applies in both directions. I think we could certainly talk a little more specifically about gender differences and what tends to motivate women versus what tends to motivate men. So there are certainly some nuances there. But in the big picture I think it's very similar.

Lee Rosen: The principles apply across the board.

Tina Lepage: They do, in terms of how you approach the other person, how you communicate, how you're listening, all of those types of things -- being willing to compromise. And if you find yourself getting stuck, really trying to figure out why you're getting stuck in that. And whether that be with a therapist, by talking to other friends and family, or by talking more to your spouse about it to really figure out -- if this is something you get stuck in all the time it's important because this is pretty foundational to the relationship.

Lee Rosen: Right. So once you find yourself getting stuck over and over again, that's when you know you ought to be talking to a counselor such as yourself. You've got to find somebody because if you're doing what you're doing and it's not working, you can't just keep doing it.

Tina Lepage: Yeah. Exactly. You have to figure out why you're doing it and then how to change from there. I had a girlfriend who said to me once --

she had sort of figured out the why but she was having trouble changing it. And she said to me, "Tina, when you compromise with Peter, you feel good. Like, after that you think, 'Oh, this is good. We came to a compromise,' and you're happy." And she was describing that when she compromises, she feels like she lost. And losing felt bad. And so she was having a really hard time compromising in her marriage because you can imagine if your perspective is compromise is losing then that's not going to go well.

If your perspective is compromise is a win for the marriage, then it goes much better. So again, she had identified here's where she's getting stuck but she was still having a hard time doing anything differently.

Lee Rosen: Right. It's not a war. We're supposed to be working together.

Tina Lepage: Right. Exactly.

Lee Rosen: What an interesting perspective.

Tina Lepage: It's not a battle. It should be the goal is a happy marriage because that's good for both people.

Lee Rosen: Right. But then you don't feel like you beat anybody.

Tina Lepage: I know.

Lee Rosen: Well, I have a feeling -- you know that story about the big car companies buying the electric car and then destroying it, or whatever? I have a feeling there will be guys wanting to destroy this show because they don't want to end up having to talk to their spouse, visit with the in-laws while they're doing the dishes.

Tina Lepage: See, I think because you framed it that way that's just not a good thing.

Lee Rosen: Well, Tina, thank you so much for helping us out here today. I think you've given some great ideas to people that will not only help wives to get their husband to do what they want or husbands to get their wives to do what they want, but really to make some marriages work that may not be working. So thank you so much.

Tina Lepage: You're welcome. Nice to be here.

Lee Rosen: I appreciate you listening in and joining us for this episode of Stay Happily Married. Let me tell you about Tina's website. It's LepageAssociates.com. I will put a link to their website in the show

notes at Stay Happily Married. The site has a lot of information. You know, some of these sites you go to and it's a page about the professional and a bio or something, but this is a site with lots of good articles and links to other things and resources. I think you will find it to be a very valuable place to go as you're working on your marriage.

You can also call Tina at her office. Dr. Tina Lepage, (919) 572-0000 -- four O's.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope you will join us again next week. We'd love to hear your comments about this show or any other episode. We love your ideas and feedback; please keep them coming. You can call our comment line at (919) 256-3083 or you can shoot us an e-mail at comments@stayhappilymarried.com.

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

Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married. If you'd like more information, please visit us on the Web at stayhappilymarried.com. We would love to hear your feedback or comments. Please e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com or call us at (919) 256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.