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Is Your Spouse Always Wrong?

This is Episode number 70 of Stay Happily Married, "Is Your Spouse Always Wrong?"

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Lee Rosen:

I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I am here in the studio -- and I'm really excited about this -- with Carolyn Craft. Carolyn has a private counseling practice in Durham, North Carolina and she specializes in communications; and she deals with sexual issues, addiction, recovery, grief and loss. She's worked as a broadcaster, which comes in handy when we're doing a podcast. She has done management and consulting in the broadcasting industry.

And this is a little bit of a different twist: she is an ordained minister since 1992. And what is fascinating about that is that she has married one of the lawyers in my firm and is about to do the ceremony for another one of our lawyers, so I'm sure we'll talk about that for a minute.

I am confident that you have heard of her in the past. For 10 years she was the host of a program on Sirius Satellite radio and her program dealt with mind, body, spirit and relationship issues. I'm very pleased to be able to welcome Carolyn Craft to the show. Thanks, Carolyn, for being here.

Carolyn Craft:

Hi, Lee. I'm glad to be here.

Lee Rosen:

It's really great. You know, let's -- before we get into this whole "is your spouse always wrong?" this wedding thing. You've been a minister since 1992. You've done a lot of weddings, right?

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Carolyn Craft: Yeah. Very much.

Lee Rosen: And you've done in our firm Holly Gray -- now Gray -- you did her ceremony and you're about to do Lisa Angel. Are you developing a sub-specialty in divorce lawyer weddings, maybe? The irony --

Carolyn Craft: You know, I love weddings. I love working in counseling with people. I love all rites of passage; it's just a wonderful time to sort of ground any sort of spiritual awareness, sacredness in our life with our everyday lives. I love working with them.

Lee Rosen: It's great. We have a lawyer in our firm who is an -- he is ordained using the Internet, which I think everybody --

Carolyn Craft: Oh, my goodness.

Lee Rosen: -- people play, you can do this thing. But in North Carolina, that's legal. You go on, you sign up, and even though you've never been a minister in a church or anything you can perform ceremonies, at least theoretically. And I think he's agitated that you've taken his slot; he wanted to officiate at Lisa Angel's wedding. But okay. You won. You've got it.

Carolyn Craft: Let me tell you, those three years I was in seminary I did everything back flips, turned myself inside out and outside in, so --

Lee Rosen: You don't necessarily think much of the Internet ministers.

Carolyn Craft: It's like, no, I don't know. You know?

Lee Rosen: Well, is your spouse always wrong? And I'm confident that the lawyers in our firm believe that they are always right when their spouse -- that's probably part of a lawyer's personality. And I probably think I'm always right and my spouse is probably always wrong.

But I think it is kind of natural where a lot of us do feel like -- we get focused on our spouse's faults. We do see them as wrong all the time. Do you see that?

Carolyn Craft: Oh, yes. And it's so natural and so human. It's our first default, our first defense. If we can make someone else wrong then we do not have to feel or deal with exactly what we are feeling. And sometimes it's just by taking a breath in that moment to say, "What is this really about and what is my part in it?"

And sometimes that is really difficult because we can obviously see that they are doing something either to hurt themselves or certainly to hurt the relationship, or they're acting juvenile. And it's so obvious. So to then say, "But what is my part in this?" that's critical and yet that's the challenge.

Lee Rosen: It's almost impossible because you really do believe that they're wrong and it is so obvious to you.

Carolyn Craft: Yeah.

Lee Rosen: But I hear you're jumping to a solution: take a minute and think. But what I see, in me anyway, is that when I believe that my spouse is wrong about whatever, I don't do that. I behave in ways -- I mean, I probably am making it worse when I do that. Is that what you see most people doing?

Carolyn Craft: Well, yes. And there is a great philosopher from the 1300s, Rumi, who said, "There is a place out beyond right-doing and wrong-doing; I will meet you there." And I notice when you're talking, the word that you use often is "I believe." And that's where we start because we have these beliefs in our head from our mother, our father, our guardian, our society, this time of years that we are on the planet and so forth, and it does automatically behave us rather than us behave. It's a default. It's automatic knee-jerk reaction.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Because we think it is the way it is.

Carolyn Craft: And we get used to useless, unnecessary suffering and pain and don't realize that we're bringing it on ourselves.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. You know, I buy that but it's like you start blaming the other person and you're so -- you blame and you spot the next problem and maybe that even creates the next problem, but you become -- there are so many layers between where you started and where you end up that it's very difficult to sort of go back.

Carolyn Craft: Well, that's the key. You're saying it's very difficult. It is. It takes effort to come back to myself because it's much easier to fall in -- I keep thinking about the limbic center of our brain; it's got pathways. We've got the cerebral, the limbic and the reptilian and some of this is limbic and reptilian. We have these pathways in our brain, just like a computer default, and we go to that because we don't think. We're not stopping.

Lee Rosen: Right. We just do. We act.

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Carolyn Craft: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: Okay. And so in an ideal world maybe we could stop ourselves and think about what we are contributing. But we don't live -- this is not just us. We're living with this other person who provides input into the situation. And doesn't -- so --

Carolyn Craft: So if they change, is what you're saying, it would make it right?

Lee Rosen: Yeah. If they would just be right once in a while. No, but seriously, they do -- it does become so much more complicated because the layers get deeper. Things get further and further and further away from wherever this all started --

Carolyn Craft: It escalates.

Lee Rosen: -- because they're responding -- yeah. It escalates.

Carolyn Craft: And then you have emotional energy tied in with it. You're feelings get all tied in with it. And that's why you have people later in years, especially, when they're looking at divorce and giving it up, they're so worn out. They're absolutely worn out to begin the process of looking at themselves, to begin the process of facing their pain.

But the good thing about doing this work is sometimes it does mean divorce, but you don't take all these issues into the next relationship. It's good even in a divorce situation to work at these things so you're not carrying it with you.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. And that -- I will tell you what I see so often is people taking the old problems with them to the next marriage.

Carolyn Craft: They will. Period. They will.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. I mean, that does seem to be the standard operating procedure for most people. Is there a way, though -- it's great if you learn the lessons and so your next marriage doesn't end in disaster. Wonderful.

But if you recognize, "Hey, I'm just going to repeat these patterns if I don't fix it, and it would be nice to save this marriage that I'm in because we have all this history and we probably have these kids," and everything else, once you've sort of got this blaming and then all the stuff that comes back at you from your spouse, how do you break that cycle and take that breath that you're talking about so you can start working on it on your own?

Carolyn Craft: I think one of the most challenging questions but yet it can stop you in your tracks and it can start building a new pathway in your brain is to say, "This is all about me." No matter what's in front of you. Within yourself, "This is all about me, my reaction to it."

Now, if somebody is beating the heck out of me, to say it's all about me seems rather crazy. However, am I staying there? Am I taking it? Am I standing there? Now, that's an extreme example but it's an example of someone acting out in front of you and you still need to take in the question, "this is all about me, what's happening right now."

Not that "I need to change," "I need to do better," "I need to be better," but how am I reacting? How am I responding? What am I carrying with myself? Why do I think I have to stay here in this situation in this moment? To ask first of all what is my participation in this? And it may be, in that example, that I need to leave. I need to leave the room; I need to take some action.

Lee Rosen: Very interesting. And so your basic thought on this is that when things are going wrong it can be fixed because really it is about you.

Carolyn Craft: Yes.

Lee Rosen: And if you have the ability to change you then you can resolve the problem.

Carolyn Craft: Magic can happen. It doesn't mean that the other person is necessarily going to change.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Carolyn Craft: That's not the overall goal. The overall goal is to make sure that you are being true to yourself and you're not just jumping into a divorce or always blaming, shaming, laying guilt, and really living up above who you really are.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Okay. So let me translate some of this into real life for us because -- and I know I'm going right back to where we started but sometimes -- let's say I'm upset my spouse doesn't contribute enough in our family, won't take the kids to school, doesn't do any cleaning, won't contribute. And so I am naturally blaming my spouse, "You're not doing this. It's not fair. I have to do this all the time," yadda-yadda-yadda. I'm stressed out. I'm miserable and you're off doing fun things.

What you're suggesting is I take a breath, calm down and say, "It's all about me." Well, I don't want to do that. My spouse won't drive and won't clean the dishes. I mean, that seems really --

Carolyn Craft: Sure.

Lee Rosen: It's very logical in sort of an intellectual way to do what you --

Carolyn Craft: Esoteric kind of way. Yeah. Sure.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. But the dishes aren't being cleaned and the kids aren't being dropped off and I am stressed out. So how do I -- how does that relate to real life?

Carolyn Craft: There's one framework that I work with that I can introduce now. And we only have enough time just to introduce it. But it does begin with -- this "all about me" is how am I reacting/responding? Am I going after this other person, making them wrong? Do I know it to be true that they never contribute? They always contribute? Even those words suggest that I don't have any kind of participation in this.

One of the frameworks is to not only stop and say, "Okay. What is my part in this?" It maybe in that situation that I am not conveying to this other individual; all I'm doing is making them wrong. Versus saying -- and here's the framework. There's four steps: observation, feelings, needs, requests. The observation is not "you always do this;" the observation is, "This morning you were reading a book. I took the children to school." There's no judgment in that. There's no evaluation. It's totally observation.

"When you read your book this morning when I took the kids to school, I felt --" and what can you imagine you might feel in that situation? Do you have a thought about that?

Lee Rosen: Well, I felt like you were a lazy piece of --

Carolyn Craft: No, no, no. This is where you get in touch with "it's all about me." What's going on in my body? What am I feeling? Ignored? Abused?

Lee Rosen: Right. More stressed out.

Carolyn Craft: Well, I felt stress. Okay. I felt stress and my need for -- and then there's this whole set of needs that we all have as human beings: the worst terrorist, the greatest saint. We all can meet at the level of need, because when I start talking to you about a need that I have, not a need for you to do something -- I need control -- I have a need

for autonomy. I have a need for respect. I have a need for understanding. I have a need for love. Everybody has those same needs.

So if I say that observation -- "You were reading a book when I took the kids to school this morning. I felt a lot of stress." -- my need for help, respect, assurance, whatever it might -- support. Maybe it's just support. Is not being met, then you have a request.

Lee Rosen: Right. Okay. It makes sense. And I hear what your -- you're really separating -- by focusing on yourself, you're really forcing yourself not to do that blaming.

Carolyn Craft: Yes. Yes. You say, "What is my part in here? Am I just resenting and huffing away and then slamming things and then being late tonight for dinner," or whatever, passively aggressively? Because I have a part in this if I'm not communicating where I am. And usually when those things -- and we don't take the time, but once we start at least considering it, it can happen in the blink of an eye.

It can happen in a busy work environment. You can do this with people in your -- you may not want to go, "Well, I feel and I have a need for," all these extra words, but you get a sense of, wait a minute. What is it that I'm really needing now? I just got off the phone. My wife took my mother to the hospital. She's stressed out. She's got to pick up the kids and I'm really feeling sad and grief right now.

It's not about her being stressed out; it's about my mother being in the hospital. But if I yell back at her, "Well, can't you stay there another hour? I can't get there. I've got an appointment," and so forth, I'm not really expressing what it is that I'm observing, feeling, needing, and then my request.

It doesn't mean that your request is going to be met, but it sure does kind of let some of the anxiousness and the energy between the two of you settle and fall away a little bit so you can actually meet at some level.

Lee Rosen: Well, it does seem like this sort of approach is much more likely to get you a positive response, a helpful response, rather than the blame thing, which is just going to get a defensive, negative, hostile --

Carolyn Craft: Yeah. And I want to add too that you can -- when working with just this one framework that I use -- it's one of the ones I use -- you can totally shift that around because when you make a request, they can

have their own stress, needs, and so forth. And so in really getting to a level of sort of compatibility in working with any framework, if you both agree this is going to work, it brings down the level of stress.

But also, you can turn it around at that point and you say, "Would you mind --" and make a request and she says, well, da-da-da, "I can't do this." And then you say -- you're observing -- "Well, when you said --" blah, blah "-- I'm imagining that you're feeling this and you have a need for --" blah, blah "-- is that right?" And you've totally turned it off of yourself and you are having empathy and compassion.

Lee Rosen: Right. So you're really communicating for a change.

Carolyn Craft: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: It's interesting because a lot of the advice that we get on this program is communicate more, but it's not always clear what that means. And I like the framework. I mean, it really does help you to get some context in which to put it in.

The other thing, we did a show -- I think it was last week -- about people being assertive in their relationships without being aggressive and without generating that hostility. And this really does feel like your framework dovetails nicely with that, where you can say this is what's going on, this is what I'm feeling, and make that request without being a jerk about it, which is what I think what happens when you're too aggressive.

Carolyn Craft: Well, we have to value that relationship is important. You and I were talking about technology before the show and that -- remember the old book *High Tech/High Touch*?

Lee Rosen: Right.

Carolyn Craft: We can get so much into the doingness of things that it's like we're - - with your children. When you stop and say, "What do you feel about that?" He says -- whatever. How do you feel about that? The attentiveness we give to our children, often we don't expect it from adults and we don't give it to adults.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Carolyn Craft: And we need to. And it doesn't take that much longer to do this. It really doesn't.

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Lee Rosen: So you don't suggest that we do your observation, feelings, needs, request by text message?

Carolyn Craft: I don't know. I think some of the text messages could be helped by using some of that. At least for you to know, what's my intent here? What do I need? And when you get in touch with what you need, you may -- I may be sending an e-mail to somebody that just made me so mad and before I do it, if I sit there and just think about it for a minute I might sit there and have a moment of grief and realize that there's something else that's just pushing the heck out of me.

Lee Rosen: Right. So I like your framework. And that's all really prefaced by this idea of taking a break and -- I don't remember how you put it exactly, but basically you're saying it really is --

Carolyn Craft: What's my part?

Lee Rosen: What's my part? Yeah.

Carolyn Craft: What's my part? That's all. You know, I'm going to write a book one day and it's going to be *Nine Marriages to get it Right*. I've been married three times. My husband with marriage to me has been married six. Now, he got married five times. He was in and out. He says he dated real heavy and just made it legal by getting married. There are so many ways that we can actually make it work by just taking that moment.

And when he and I got together it was the first time we really, really did our work. We really said, "You know what? I don't want to be with anybody again, nor be with myself, unless no matter what's happening I first say, 'What's my part in this?'" And that's really hard when you're dealing with alcohol, abuse, workaholism, or any of those substance addictions or process addictions or something. It's difficult.

Lee Rosen: Right. Yeah. It's much easier to go the other way. It's much more convenient for somebody else to be at fault.

Carolyn Craft: "They're wrong. They're totally wrong."

Lee Rosen: Absolutely. So in your practice, obviously you're teaching this approach that you're talking about, but what is it like to come and see you? How are you helping people and what sort of folks are you dealing with with marriages?

Carolyn Craft: Before they break up; after they've broken up; I think that probably some of the people that you also see, that they really don't want to

because of the kids but they're finally at a point that they've tried everything. I think that most relationships need someone to talk to to help them either design some frameworks that work for them, to work with them on communication -- and that's one of the big ones for me. I've been in communications all my life -- but is really identifying what I am communicating. We communicate whether we open our mouth or not; we're communicating.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Carolyn Craft: And I think because my belief is that everybody ought to have somebody they can talk to in a way that is nonjudgmental and supportive so they can work through whatever it is that they're living, whatever it is that they're stuffing, whatever it is that -- even in their childhood. There are those issues that come up too. But we will be 75 or 80-year-old children if we don't find out what's pushing us.

And I guess in your introduction, I do work with sexual issues; addiction issues; I really enjoy working with teenagers, especially teenage girls, and giving them an opportunity to not get in the same ruts that we've gotten in as we've gotten older.

Lee Rosen: Right. What excites you the most? When you hear you have an appointment with some -- what is the thing you're most passionate about that you just think, "Gosh, I cannot wait to see this person with this issue"? What do you love?

Carolyn Craft: Issues in particular? Probably the couples. Even if the couple is not there -- and often we'll have the woman versus the man; probably 60 to 70 percent women to the men -- I think if it's hip for the men and they realize that it's okay to be wrong, it's okay to think and talk about feelings, that they become more manly. They become more empowered.

Lee Rosen: I don't want to talk about feelings but I know I'm wrong. I've been told for 20 years, so I'm confident I'm wrong. I've given up on that.

Carolyn Craft: Yeah. You're supposed to be right. I mean, that's -- 17,000 years ago men had to be right and we haven't changed that much since then.

Lee Rosen: Well, you people are beating us down. We understand. We're beginning to accept it. We want our man-cave and we'll be right in there but beyond that we know we're wrong.

Carolyn Craft: You know, I do want to mention too, one of my interviews -- last interviews before that show went off the air -- John Gray's book --

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the Mars and Venus books are good, but the last book, I think it's *Mars and Venus in Conflict* --

Lee Rosen: Maybe so.

Carolyn Craft: I believe. But the very last one he has done some work, his own internal word processing and so forth. It is a very powerful book. So I just wanted to recommend that.

Lee Rosen: Interesting.

Carolyn Craft: I get nothing for recommending it.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Well, Carolyn, thank you so much for taking the time out to talk with us. And thank you for marrying all of our lawyers.

Carolyn Craft: Okay.

Lee Rosen: That's really working out for us so I appreciate it.

Carolyn Craft: Good.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. You should go and check out Carolyn's website. She has two of them. And one will tell you more about her counseling practice; that's at -- and I'll put a link to this in the show notes, but let me go ahead and tell it to you. It's www.unity.vpweb.com. And I'll put a link to that. And then the other one is all about her speaking and coaching and broadcasting and that's at CarolynCraft.com. Have I got that right?

Carolyn Craft: Yeah. And I usually say Craft with a C.

Lee Rosen: Craft with a C. Okay. Well, thank you so much for joining us today.

Carolyn Craft: Thank you.

Lee Rosen: I was thrilled to talk with you. I hope that all of you listening will join us again next week. We will be back as usual every week, and if you have comments about this episode or any of our shows we love to hear from you. We love to hear your suggestions about guests and topics. We really take that feedback to heart and put it to work and I'm sure that those of you that have sent in comments recently are seeing us doing it because we're inviting the folks that you suggest we invite. So thank you so much.

You can reach us by putting a comment on the site at StayHappilyMarried.com.

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You can e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com. Or you can call our comment line at (919) 256-3083.

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

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