



STAY
happily married
.com

Change Your Mindset, Not Your Man

This is Stay Happily Married episode #87, "Change Your Mindset, Not Your Man."

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 as my guest today by telephone Sally B. Watkins. She's in California right now. She's a licensed psychotherapist. She's been counseling individuals and couples in private practice in California for more than 20 years.

She loves sailing with her husband in the Pacific Northwest. They have a couple of grown kids -- two grown boys, as a matter of fact. And she currently counsels at Healing Words Coaching and Psychotherapy.

But the most significant thing going on in her life right now I think is that she just released her first book, *Change Your Mindset, Not Your Man: Learn to Love What's Right Instead of Trying to Fix What's Wrong*.

Welcome to the show, Sally.

Sally Watkins: Hi, Lee.

Lee Rosen: I am really glad you could join us today. You know, just the title of your book fascinates me and kind of pulls me in and so I am dying to hear more about all of this. And I love the idea of "change your mindset, not your man," because we see too many people that change their spouse; that's the first thing they do.

Can you fill us in? Give us a little bit of background on why you wrote the book and what you're addressing about marriage.

Sally Watkins: Okay. Maybe it's hard for a man to fully understand this, but practically every woman -- myself included -- comes to that point in a relationship where everything seems to have changed. The honeymoon fervor has worn off. All that excitement, the chemistry, all that euphoria, everybody's best behavior somehow is gone. And that magic that she's dreamed of and hoped for and wanted for most of her life, actually, is gone.

Many women come into my therapy practice with a lot of really deep disappointment, confusion about whether this relationship is going to make it, a lot of anger and resentment because they're not getting these needs fulfilled that they always thought would be there in a relationship. A lot of depression sometimes -- they're on antidepressants. They're not sleeping well. They're very troubled. And in many cases it's not something that can be fixed or even needs to be fixed.

And some of the ways that the women have tried to fix it -- telling him about her feelings, sharing her pain, complaining, criticizing -- are some of the worst things that she can do. And because men are highly sensitive to criticism she made possibly the situation worse by telling him that he's not meeting her needs, because he's not really attuned to relationship probably as much as she is. And sometimes men will retreat or withdraw or give up if they think that she's not going to be pleased or the relationship isn't working for her.

So that's what I see a lot of.

Lee Rosen: So he turns out not to be exactly what she expected and things get off on the -- at least, they end up off the tracks. Are there myths out there, are there ideas out there that we all sort of share that result in us sort of not getting what we thought we were getting?

Sally Watkins: You know, the way women are socialized growing up as little girls is vastly different from the way boys are and I think that's part of why there's this disconnected.

Girls from a very early age, they're playing with Barbies and playing wedding. And all of the fairy stories, a lot of the Disney movies show relationship in a fantasy sort of way, that the perfect life happens when these two people connect in this fateful way. Fate brings them together and then instantly there's happily ever after, instant excitement.

So our culture idealizes romantic love everywhere. Everywhere. Songs, movies, novels are constantly showing this kind of thing where it's just two people that are right for each other, soul mates, and everything's perfect after that.

So I think victimizes women in a way. You know, we come to relationships expecting that it's going to fulfill us and it's going to be everything and make us happy. And even women I see who have big careers and salaries and are well-educated and so forth, they also dream of this soul mate kind of love.

And then on the other hand, men are not really socialized to fulfill these fantasies. Men are not attuned as much to relationship. They're not attuned as much to feelings and emotions. In fact, a lot of men -- maybe of your generation and certainly of my generation -- were taught to be tough and not give into their feelings and not be a wuss. So they're not really prepared, probably, to fulfill what women really want.

So the other part of the myth is that all relationships take work. That's the other thing. It's not just about finding the right person but it's about doing the work of working out the snags and the conflicts and learning how to get along and being a mature partner in an equal relationship. It's not just about finding the right person.

So when a person comes to me and thinks "this may not be the right person; I need to move out and find a new person," that's usually a recipe for disaster because you usually just substitute one set of problems for another because every relationship is going to take some work.

Lee Rosen: Well, yeah. That all makes sense. But you know -- well, let me ask you this. In the book you write about -- you have this idea of it being necessary for women to star in their own lives. I think you literally -- you used the word "star" in their own life. What does that mean? What is that all about?

Sally Watkins: Well, you know, I think when a woman who's resourceful and develops herself, she finds her own dreams and makes a full life with friends, activities, jobs or volunteer work or things that fulfill her, then she actually is probably more attractive to him because she's not looking to him and complaining to him and wanting so much from the relationship.

So I'm saying that women who are happy and fulfilled, they radiate a certain positive energy that their partner benefits from, actually.

Men who are in a partnership with a woman who's happy, fulfilled, and has a full, interesting life, he's getting a charge probably from all that good energy in the household. And then when she's kind of blue and down and negative and unhappy and complaining and so forth, sometimes a man decides he needs to get away from that; he needs to withdraw from that and work in the garage or go on a fishing trip because he doesn't know what to do with that, actually.

So both partners can be happier if she realizes that it's her job, to a certain extent, to fulfill her own dreams and her own needs and not look to the relationship to be everything.

Lee Rosen: Makes sense. She ought to be a star in her own life. I buy that. You also talk about the idea of leading by example. What is that all about?

Sally Watkins: Well, you know, women, they're usually the driving force in the relationship. There's a rare couple that comes in that's driven by the man. Usually when couples come to therapy it's most often the woman who wants that.

Relationship is more important to women. That's how they were socialized. Whether by nature or nurture, we're interested in relating to other people and connecting to other people so we have more skills in that area. Even from tiny girlhood you see little girls who are very sensitive to other kids' needs and they're very nurturing. So this is something that's built into our nature. So in that sense women can lead the way and can do things in their relationships that help men understand how to be better partners, how to be in a relationship.

Communication is one area that women can practice being -- asking for what they want and not expecting that the man is going to be sensitive and understand everything they want. So she can be more direct. Not be upset or negative if she doesn't get it but put her needs out there in a positive, direct way.

The whole idea of active listening is another thing that women can practice where they demonstrate to a man how to listen and really take in what he's saying without opposing it or interjecting her own ideas and being receptive. And then asking him to do the same, saying, "I'd like you to just listen to me. And not fix it or offer your own ideas, but just try to understand and hear where I'm coming from." So she can do that in a natural sort of way in the relationship.

Lee Rosen: So your position is basically that she's better at some of this stuff and that she's learned it all of her life and he maybe isn't -- it doesn't come easily to him. And that she ought to use that education to help the relationship by teaching him some of these skills.

Sally Watkins: Yeah. And not as a formalized way but just --

Lee Rosen: Right.

Sally Watkins: -- in a way that he can pick up on this and see that it works and it helps to make things better between them. Exactly.

Lee Rosen: Are there other strategies that you cover in the book to help people figure out ways to have less conflict, to sort of get along better or have a more harmonious home life?

Sally Watkins: Yes. I think that's -- again, women have a lot more power to make these things happen. And one way is not personalize things. I think women tend to read into a man's behavior. If he's distracted or preoccupied or not emotionally available, sometimes she'll make up a story that that's about her or that he doesn't want to be with her, he doesn't love her, and so forth.

If he's not sensitive to her feelings or remembers special days or that kind of thing. Sometimes women even test a guy to see if he'll give up something he wants to do to be with her. And then if he doesn't, that has different meanings. It means he doesn't care for her or doesn't love her or doesn't want to be with her.

I think women can really look at some of these things and see that she doesn't have to attach that kind of meaning because it really doesn't mean that to me. They're not doing it for those reasons that she may come up with.

Another thing is that men do concrete -- what I call concrete love more than abstract love. And men will service your car or go to a hard job and make money. He'll bring you a cup of coffee. He'll do concrete things and a women sometimes doesn't see that as love when she could really interpret that as love.

Other ways that she can help him be more relational and reduce conflicts, she can not expect him to remember special events or figure out the perfect gift for her. She can make that a lot easier for him with hints and clues and wish lists and so forth.

Lee Rosen: You talked about counseling earlier, I think at the outset of the program. What do you think about -- I mean, obviously you do counseling, but is that always the best option? I get the sense that you think that there are some types of counseling that really maybe aren't a good idea. What are your thoughts on that?

Sally Watkins: Well, the worst counseling sessions are those where a woman will bring her husband in for a session and then she'll ambush him with all the problems and things that are wrong and all the complaints and a whole storehouse sometimes of things that have been built up over time. And that never goes anywhere good.

Sometimes couples leave that kind of a session, they're both angry, things are worse afterwards than even before. So I really try to avoid that kind of an ambushing, what I call it, because he's kind of clueless about what's going to happen there.

In the best case scenario both partners are there because they want to make changes in their relationship and they see that maybe a third person can help them resolve some conflicts and work together to make things better between them. So they're both actively involved in the counseling process and see that this could improve things for them. That's the best kind of counseling.

Lee Rosen: Well, what sort of approach do you take when you're counseling couples with some of the issues we're talking about today? In your practice what are you doing?

Sally Watkins: Well, I usually try to see behavioral changes rather than a complete personality transplant. When someone frames the problem as a personality flaw -- like he's insensitive, he's irresponsible, he's passive, he's indifferent, he's unaffectionate -- those kinds of things can't be fixed. So I try to avoid framing the problem that way.

So if we can frame the problem as behavioral changes -- I want to spend more time together, I want to work on our financial problems, I want us to plan activities together, I want us to work out some of our parenting issues -- those kinds of things can be worked on in a helpful, positive way. So I like to see that as the focus in counseling.

And also, I'm a really big advocate of acceptance, that our needs are not always going to be the same over time and true friendship and true love is about supporting and accepting each other as we grow and develop over time and not trying to get our partner to be always what we need or what works for us; to see that part of our job is to

allow that person to grow and evolve, even if it doesn't always meet our needs. Sometimes we can't always make it work out perfectly.

I don't know if you're aware that codependence is a big topic. You probably hear that a lot.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Sally Watkins: But codependence is struggling within the relationship to get each other to be more of what I want and be more of what I need and don't change if it's going to make me uncomfortable and so forth. And that's trying to choreograph each other's growth so it's always good for me. So I think that has to go and we have to just grow in maturity and acceptance and love so that people can feel good about their own lives and their own development.

Lee Rosen: So going back to sort of where we started, where women reach a point in every marriage I guess where things are not what they expected and they're feeling some disappointment based on all of those ideas that they had before marriage, if one of those women picks up your book how does it help? What does it do for them?

Sally Watkins: You know, I think my book is really packed full of all kinds of ideas and tips that I've developed in my counseling practice. So in a way, if a woman really uses that, she saves a lot of money and a lot of time going to counseling because everything's in there about how she can grow and develop psychologically, spiritually, physically, mentally so that she can become strong and happy and resourceful and take the pressure off her relationship to be everything.

So it's really a lot of advice about how women can change themselves. Because when you get right down it, each of us can only change ourselves; we can't change others. And it helps her to see that there's a lot of things that she can do that are going to make her different, indirectly her husband different, and change the relationship in a positive way without going to therapy. I think there's a lot to learn and it's a lot to do.

Lee Rosen: Terrific. Well, I want to make reference to your website. It's SallyWatkins.net. I understand that the website has a -- that you can download the first chapter of the book. Is that right?

Sally Watkins: Yes. Uh-huh. You can read the first chapter.

Lee Rosen: Well, we've covered a lot of ground. Is there anything else we need to know?

Sally Watkins: No, I think we've covered a lot, Lee. This has been really great. I think we've given your listeners a good idea of how they can take something that might be painful and difficult and problematic in their relationship and turn it into something that would be really good and powerful and positive. So that's what I'm about. That's what my life's been about, what my book is about.

Lee Rosen: Well, thank you. I appreciate you being with us today.

Sally Watkins: Thanks, Lee.

Lee Rosen: I want to encourage you to go and visit Sally's website. It's SallyWatkins.net. I'll put a link to it in the show notes so that you can find it easily. And as she mentioned, you can download a copy of the first chapter of the book for free, make sure you like it before you buy it. And I'll put a link to the book in the show notes as well. You can get it at Amazon.com, *Change Your Mindset, Not Your Man: Learn to Love What's Right Instead of Trying to Fix What's Wrong*.

Sally also has a blog there at SallyWatkins.net, so take a look at SallyWatkins.net.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope that you will join us again next week. You have great feedback for us every week. We love to hear it. You can call us with your comments. We have a comment line set up at (919) 256-3083. You can also e-mail us 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.