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Are You Making the Same Mistakes the Second Time Around?

This is episode 110 of Stay Happily Married, "Are You Making the Same Mistakes the Second Time Around?"

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 am here via Skype today with Tim Lewis. Tim is a marriage coach. He's an AELM certified counselor and a certified Prepare-Enrich counselor. He practices in Huntersville, North Carolina. When he's not helping couples resolve difficult issues, you can usually find him out hiking or camping.

Tim and his wife Christina have been married for almost 20 years. That's always a good sign. They have two young sons and they have a very unique approach that combines coaching and design that we'll talk about a little bit later in the show.

Tim, I am so glad you could be here. Welcome to the show.

Tim Lewis: Thank you, Lee. Glad to be here.

Lee Rosen: You know, I want to go way back for just a minute. Before we talk about the whole second time around and second marriages, I should probably tell you I sometimes introduce my wife as my "first" wife, which really aggravates her.

But I want to dig in and ask you, how did you decide that counseling was for you? I mean, some of us feel like we have enough problems

to deal with. You went out and found more of them. What got you interested in this?

Tim Lewis: That's a great question. I actually started my quest on becoming a marriage coach by actually being in corporate America and seeing so many coworkers and friends that were just unhappily married. And I had a conversation in my office with a group of coworkers and it was right then and there that I just said, you know what? I love my job but I think there's other things in life that I really would enjoy doing.

So I quit corporate America and basically went back to school. And my wife and I started a company -- The Redesign Company -- and we moved to Charlotte. And that was about six years and that started our venture. So here we are today.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, that's terrific. You know, some folks when they're listening to these shows they're doing it right at their computer. You've probably done that. I've certainly done it. Let's go ahead and give them your website information so that if they're listening to us and want to check it out, they can go ahead and do it.

You've got -- I know you've got LoveComingHome.com.

Tim Lewis: Right.

Lee Rosen: Is that the best place?

Tim Lewis: Yep.

Lee Rosen: Okay.

Tim Lewis: Yeah. LoveComingHome.com, our company motto. And also we have a Facebook page as well at [Facebook.com/LoveComingHome](https://www.facebook.com/LoveComingHome).

Lee Rosen: Love Coming Home. Okay. Yeah. Can't beat it. And I assume when you say "love coming home" it means -- I mean, it really works in a variety of ways. It strikes me as I love coming home to my spouse. Is that kind of where you guys were coming from?

Tim Lewis: Yeah. When we started the business we said that's what we want our clients to say, that they look forward to it. Unfortunately, for many years of our marriage early on I didn't love coming home. And I wanted to. And so we looked for ways to do that; we improved our marriage.

And that's really how I speak to clients, from experience. And there were nights that I would sit in my car on my way home and I just said, "I don't want to go home tonight," whether it was when we had young children -- and I know some guys just don't like changing diapers and doing the nighttime routine.

I don't know how many times I would walk through the door and my wife would hand me my sons and say, "I'm done. Your turn." And I just worked 10 hours and now I've got to come home and do this. So I understand that. I know where people are coming from. Marriage is a sacrifice but it's the best sacrifice you'll make.

Lee Rosen: Let me ask you this. How often is it that you find yourself coaching couples who are on a second marriage? I'm sure that you're seeing a lot of first marriages, but what about the second marriages? How often is that coming up in your practice?

Tim Lewis: Actually, the percentage falls right in line with the national statistics, which is about 50 to 60 percent of marriages now are remarriages. So that's about what I'm seeing with my clients.

I just read something recently that the average by the end of this year -- or even this year -- was predicted that there's going to be more step-families in the United States than any other family. So that just blew me away.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. So it makes sense that it would be the bulk of --

Tim Lewis: Yeah.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Absolutely.

Tim Lewis: More and more.

Lee Rosen: Do you find that folks getting married for a second time are utilizing premarital counseling? Is that something that appeals to them?

Tim Lewis: Unfortunately, not enough. Although I do find that couples that are getting remarried do take it a lot more seriously than new couples getting married for the first time. Obviously with the rise of divorce over the years there's more and more couples getting remarried, but some of the traditional approaches from well-meaning pastors and clergy, I think it just simply aren't working.

There's a lot of tools and resources that are out there that were used for many years and they're just outdated. And I think they're leaving remarried couples unprepared for their next marriage. And there's

just such a vast array of difficulties in a remarriage that you just don't see in a first marriage.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. I would imagine there are a lot of different issues. I'm guessing -- you correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm guessing when somebody in a second marriage starts to feel like things are spinning out of control and aren't going well and they come in to see you that that's a whole different thing than somebody coming in after a -- as a first marriage unravels. I would think that sort of the despair about having it go bad the second time might be even worse.

Tim Lewis: Yeah, absolutely. And I think the overriding emotion when a couple comes in is that fear that you just said. They're frustrated. They're worn out. They're feeling hopeless like, here we go again. Coming from a second marriage and feeling like a failure.

And even couples that are getting remarried from a death or a widow situation, that fear that says something bad's going to happen this time around. And fear leads to anger and anger leads to suffering. So it's not uncommon for them to come in just scared to death that here we go.

Lee Rosen: Do you think it's harder the second time? Is it objectively more difficult to make a second marriage work than a first marriage?

Tim Lewis: I think so. I mean, there's so many factors involved with the second marriage that I said you just don't have the same type of marriage. It really is different. You've got issues that come up from the past. You've got -- in some cases there's children involved, so that definitely is tough.

I think what often complicates a remarriage with children could be an ex-spouse that is not necessarily always hostile, but you didn't get along with them in the first marriage. And now you've got to work with them and the children in the second marriage.

And I think also when -- if you've never been married before I always coach my clients to take a year, really -- that first year and dedicate yourself to that person. Spend time to get to know each other. Because I know our first year of marriage we almost didn't make it. I came in with all these expectations of what a wife was supposed to be. My wife came in with all these expectations of what a husband was supposed to be. And we learned a lot that first year. And too often couples will jump in, they'll start having children.

But in a second marriage you already -- if you've got children, there's no bonding time. You're jumping right in. There's the kids. And it really doesn't take long for the biological parent to feel like they're caught in between their children and their spouse. The loyalty gets questioned. Again, so many issues to talk about.

You've got children, especially teenagers, that may not even want to be in the situation. They wanted their parents to stay together. And teenagers are -- you have teenagers?

Lee Rosen: Yeah.

Tim Lewis: So you know what that's like.

Lee Rosen: Absolutely. Yeah. No, I hear you. And it does seem like having the whole complication of dealing with a former spouse and with the kids -- wow. I mean, that has got to be just overwhelming. As you're trying to negotiate all the issues that a couple that doesn't have all of that is trying to do.

Tim Lewis: Right.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. It's a double-whammy. Are there things that you see that folks do in these second marriages? I guess as they're sort of jumping into it or getting it going, are there things that they do that maybe make things worse, not better?

Tim Lewis: Well, how much time do we have? I think one of the things that is an important issue to talk about with remarried couples and that's the word "blended." I don't know if you've heard that before --

Lee Rosen: Mm-hmm.

Tim Lewis: -- but often remarried couples are referred to as a blended family. And I think that's such a misnomer because step-families really shouldn't blend. If you think of a blender, the common household device, what does it do? It blends it up. It whips it up. It creams things, makes it smooth. But in the process everything gets jumbled together.

And so when a step-family does that, the individualities, the individual people within the family all get thrown in. And blending a family -- sometimes people get crushed in that. They get whipped around and they get meshed into something else. They get forgotten. And there's really no identity for some of the -- even the children in it.

And blending families is not the goal. It really -- it causes a lot of the day-to-day problems that come up. And rather than try to blend a family I think couples need to take a more realistic approach of integration of individuals. And it's more of like a lasagna where you have the different layers and the different -- where they get mixed in a little bit but you can still tell what the different ingredients are.

And actually, there's an author -- Ron Deal -- who talks about having a crock pot mentality. And I think that's kind of a neat way to look at a remarriage situation because a crock pot -- you really have to take things slowly.

Lee Rosen: You know, you're making me hungry.

Tim Lewis: Well, I'm kind of hungry too.

Lee Rosen: No, but I think that's a valid point. A lasagna -- more like a lasagna and less like a drink made in a smoothie. Because you do leave all the elements. They do in a sense. I mean, the word "blend" -- I guess they don't blend but they meld together and they fit together into something that works but you still can identify all those individual elements. That makes a lot of sense.

Tim Lewis: Well, and I think with -- take, for example, I bring two children into my new marriage, my wife brings two children in, and let's say we've got a -- I have a 12-year-old and my wife has a 12-year-old. Well, now who's the oldest? So the birth orders get messed up. It's no longer a traditional first-born, middle child -- and that gets difficult.

Role responsibilities, who does the chores? Maybe my wife did it differently in her marriage -- in her first marriage -- and I have the kids unload the dishes. She never has the kids unload the dishes. That becomes a point of conflict.

My child behaves differently than her child. So it's all kinds of -- like I said, we could go on for hours about it.

I think one of the more serious issues would probably have to be with the ex, as I said. When you've got problems with your ex -- and I've heard it be told that just becomes a battle where the children become prisoners of war. And that's just so sad. And couples really need to have parenting plans in place. They need to work together with their ex-spouses. And I think that just causes unnecessary anxiety.

Lee Rosen: Right. Just makes everything so complicated.

Tim Lewis: Absolutely.

Lee Rosen: You see folks -- by the time they get to you they're really serious about getting some help. But I'm sure they've all tried a variety of things to work things out. I mean, I see people crowded around the marriage section in the bookstore and I know people are trying all kinds of things on their own. What sort of things have you seen people try before they get to the point where they come in to see you?

Tim Lewis: Well, I think all of those things out there are good resources. I think there's a lot of good tools. I don't think they're -- the things that they're trying to do are necessarily wrong. But I think what they aren't doing is looking at their realistic expectations.

I think a couple getting remarried, like that blender situation, they're turning that blender on high and they're trying to get their families to become a family too quickly. And I really think that they need to have a realistic expectation about that. Everyone says -- all the experts say -- it's going to take four to seven years for your family to become like a family --

Lee Rosen: Wow.

Tim Lewis: -- that you feel comfortable. That's astonishing. I mean, four to seven years, I mean, holy cow. That's a long time. But when you think about a first marriage -- I've been married almost 20 years and I still learn things about my wife. I mean, I just found out something new yesterday about her. So it takes time.

And I think too often a remarried couple will look for ways to make everyone happy. And I think that's important, certainly, but I think a weak marital relationship causes a lot of problems as well. So couples really need to focus on that marriage relationship. And once that marriage relationship is established, everything else seems to fall in line.

And I think people -- when you talk about what they've tried in the past, again, not really the issue. But the issue is assuming that problems are going to go away, that they're going to solve themselves. And that's just classic avoidance.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. I can see where it would take a long time, especially where you have kids in a second marriage. Because in the first marriage you have at least some period, if there are no kids, where you can really focus on the marriage. But boy, with a second marriage,

especially if there are kids or people are further along in their careers or whatever, you're just jumping in going at 100 percent. And there's not -- I don't know over seven years how much time you even spend together unless you really focus on it. That's very interesting. Hadn't thought of it quite that way.

So when somebody finally does come to you -- they may have tried different ideas and it isn't working; they feel like they need to come see you. What is the plan of attack -- how do you approach these folks that are struggling with a second or subsequent marriage?

Tim Lewis: Well, my job as a coach is to partner with them; to ask the questions that lead to them finding some answers on their own; taking a real proactive approach to it; and helping couples develop a mission, kind of a vision for their marriage. And this is great in a first marriage or a second marriage or a third.

And putting together an action plan. I know it sounds silly but I think it's important to have family meetings. I think it's important to make sure that everyone has a voice. And so we try to identify some unhealthy behavior patterns and replace those with some healthy patterns.

As you mentioned, I'm a Prepare and Enrich counselor as well and with that the folks over at Life Innovations have an inventory that couples take and it's got about 165 questions on it. And it's just excellent for finding some strengths and some growth areas that we can look at and say, "This is what you guys are really great at and these are some areas that we need to really focus on."

So I think just empowering couples to change. The goal with any marriage is unity and that means change. Things are going to change. You don't get that unity without change.

Lee Rosen: Right. Makes a lot of sense. Now, I want to get a little bit more of a feel for what goes on at The Redesign Company. Tell me about what you and Christina are doing that.

Tim Lewis: Great. I'd love to. Well, Christina and I -- as I said, we started this company about five years ago. We're in our sixth year now. And Christina and I work together to really help people to love coming home.

And she helps people redesign their homes, which is a form of interior design. She does color consultations. She does space planning. She helps put the furniture where it needs to go.

Our philosophy with that side of the business is we really like to work with what you have. There's no sense in going out and buying new stuff if you don't need it. You bought that sofa because you loved it so let's make it work with what you have. And again, trying to save people money; live well, spend less.

On my side of the business, I help couples to redesign their marriage. And so when people choose to make their lives better in one of these two ways, there's a -- we just see this beautiful ripple effect.

So trying to change the world, make it a better place one family at a time.

Lee Rosen: Makes a lot of sense. We've done some shows here in the past on the feng shui concept, had an expert in here talking about that. And it is interesting how these things sort of go hand in hand. I'm fascinated by that.

Tim Lewis: Yeah. We actually were amazed. We started her business first while I was in school and we were amazed at how many couples she worked with that said they wanted to see somebody about their marriage issues. And so it just seemed like a natural fit to merge the two businesses together into one.

Lee Rosen: Tim, we've covered a lot of ground today. Is there anything else we should know?

Tim Lewis: Oh, boy. Where to start? I guess what I'd really like to point out to listeners is just the importance of reaffirming that marriage relationship. I can't stress it enough. I think couples that move in that direction towards a great marriage, making that a first priority really lays the foundation for that family that's going to last a lifetime.

Couples getting married for the first time I always ask them, "When are you planning to get divorced?" And we get a chuckle out of it, but the reality of that is half of the marriages end in divorce. So I think that marriage relationship is so vital.

And I guess I want to encourage your listeners to never stop learning. Never stop learning about your spouse. Never stop learning about the marriage, what you can do better. We can always do it better. We can always communicate better. We can always resolve conflict better. I actually listened to one of our podcasts on resolving conflict and just loved it. Great, great podcast. So keep listening to these amazing podcasts.

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Lee Rosen: Well, thanks, Tim. Tim, I am so grateful that you could be with us today. Thank you so much.

Tim Lewis: It has been a pleasure. And just always choose love and peace.

Lee Rosen: Sounds like great advice. Can't go wrong with that.

You can learn a whole lot more about Tim and Christina at their website for The Redesign Company. It's LoveComingHome.com. I'll put a link to that in the show notes, of course. Or you can call them. They're in Huntersville, North Carolina, just outside of Charlotte, North Carolina. That's at (704) 604-2687.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope you will join us again next week. In the meantime, we are so grateful for your comments and your feedback. You can reach us by calling the comment line at (919) 256-3083 or you can e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com.

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

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