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The Worst Marriage Advice Ever

This is Stay Happily Married #120, "The Worst Marriage Advice Ever."

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 and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I am here with Dr. Katrina Kuzyszyn-Jones. Katrina's been with us several times before. She's a psychologist with more than 10 years of experience, both clinical and in forensic psychology. She practices with Lepage Associates in Durham, North Carolina. If you want to check out their website, it's LepageAssociates.com.

Now, Katrina also teaches university students and she does a lot of speaking for local groups. Today she's going to be talking to us about some marriage advice she has heard that really does do more harm than good.

Welcome back to the show, Katrina.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Thank you.

Lee Rosen: You know, I'm excited about this. When we talk about bad marriage advice -- I mean, there is a lot of it out there. I assume this is coming from maybe well-intentioned friends and family. Is that usually the source of this bad stuff?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: It's certainly from family and friends. But I think that there are also some things floating out there in places like *Cosmo* magazine that kind of give out some erroneous information.

Lee Rosen: You mean all those headlines that I see in the grocery store checkout line?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Yes.

Lee Rosen: That's not the best source of marriage advice?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Not the best source for your information, no.

Lee Rosen: Shocking. I am totally surprised by that. That is where I would have turned. Good to know.

Well, you know, you're in the room. You're literally one-on-one with couples that are struggling in their marriage every day. And what I'm wondering is, how often do you see the people that you're meeting with actually hurting their relationships by trying to follow this advice that they're getting from *Cosmo* or family or friends or wherever it's coming from?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: I think often enough, really. I mean, I think the main problem is that it forms these kind of misguided expectations for people. And then when they try these things and it doesn't work out, they feel very disappointed or they feel that they've done something wrong or that they're partner's not kind of going along with the way things should be going.

And so it's not even that it's just a bad idea, but then when they try it and it doesn't work, well, what's going on? And they perhaps blame it on something else in the relationship.

Lee Rosen: So they get all geared up that five quick ways to use grapefruit to make your marriage better is going to work.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: Right. There's all this grapefruit and they still aren't getting along and, oh, no, what do we do now?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Right.

Lee Rosen: Right. I can see that. That makes a lot of sense. And these articles and everything people tell you -- I mean, you see it in marriage; you see it in weight loss. I mean, it does feel -- you're really disappointed. You're kind of crestfallen when it doesn't play out the way it should.

So what I'm wondering is, what are some of the pieces of advice you're hearing that do make things worse?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Well, I have to say this is really fun to come up with because there are so many different things out there that as a therapist you hear and you're just like, oh, that is not what you should be listening to. So I tried to come up with some of the top five things.

So the first one is, don't go to sleep angry.

Lee Rosen: Oh, I've heard that forever. You think that's a bad idea?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Yeah. It's not so much that it's -- it's not great to try to sleep when you're angry so it kind of makes sense that you would want to resolve things before you go to sleep. But the problem is that if you are stuck in a gridlock over a conflict, you're not really resolving that conflict; then you're up until 3:00 in the morning. And when you're up at 3:00 in the morning, you're still not solving it because not only are you exhausted, but then you're not thinking straight.

And so sometimes we just need some time to kind of digest the information, sleep on it, and then you can talk about it more clearly the next day.

Lee Rosen: You know, I don't know how it is for other people, but sometimes I think that whole "don't go to sleep when you're angry" thing -- it's hard to sleep because you have this unresolved issue. I guess maybe early in relationships when you think that the issue could blow out of control -- I mean, at this point I've been married 20 years. I can wake up in the morning and know, hey, we're still going to be married no matter how big the issue. But I think early on you really do worry about it.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Yes. And I think that of course in the ideal world you would be able to talk about it at 6:00, have some dinner, get calmed down for the evening and then go to sleep and have everything be great. But it doesn't always work out that way.

Lee Rosen: Right. Okay. So do go to sleep angry.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Yes.

Lee Rosen: I guess that's the good advice. What other ones have you heard? What's number two on the list?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: That you have to do everything together.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: So while it's really important to have shared activities and values, it's equally important to have your own space, your own interests, your own friends. And it's kind of a matter of figuring out what works for that couple. Because that's not to say that you shouldn't be spending time together, but that everybody needs to have something that if your partner is busy, you don't want to feel abandoned; you don't want to feel lonely. You want to have your own thing to do if your partner has to go out of town.

If your spouse has to go away for business or something like that and all you ever do is spend time with your spouse, then that's not going to be a great feeling when they're not around. And this also helps you feel excited about spending time with your partner if you're not just kind of doing everything together all of the time and maybe getting on each other's nerves.

Lee Rosen: Right. No, that makes a lot of sense. And I do have some friends that are sort of joined at the hip, never seem to do anything independently. And, yeah, that's not good. I watched in my family -- my father died at a fairly early age and if my mother had not had that whole sort of independent circle of activities and friends, it would have really been tough on her, I think.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Yeah.

Lee Rosen: Interesting. Number three is what?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Only have sex when you want to.

Lee Rosen: Well, that would be easy --

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: I think there should be a lot of ladies out there who object to this one.

Lee Rosen: Guys I think would -- there would be sex all the time if that were -- so, yeah, I assume this one is aimed at the wives?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Yes, for the most part, although it depends on how old you are that sometimes it can be reversed in our 30s and 40s. But the thing is, if this is true there would just be some couples who never had sex, whether it's that you are interested on a different day that your spouse is interested; we have stress; we feel tired; or, you know what? I'm just not in the mood. And really, all of that is, really it's just kind of excuses.

You don't have to want to, but you do need to be willing. So this is not license to "you will have sex with me, whether you want to or not" kind of thing. You do have to be a willing participant. But you have to keep in mind that sex reduces that stress that you're feeling and it actually gives you energy to reduce that fatigue. If you're not feeling good about your body then who better to help you feel sexy and loveable than your spouse? And I think a lot of people kind of forget that once you get started, you do get into the mood. And so sometimes just from that standpoint you can kind of get over the sleepiness hump.

But then sometimes you just have to do something that's good for your partner because that's good for your relationship. Not all of the time. It doesn't mean that you never get to say no. But if you haven't had sex in a couple of weeks and you're like, "Oh, it's just one more night of exhaustion," maybe this is the night to say, "Okay, I'm willing and let's do this." And then you end up having a good time, hopefully.

Lee Rosen: I think -- if you write a book or something, I promise I'll buy a copy. You could turn number three right into a whole program. Yeah. That works for me.

Okay. Number four. What is that bad advice?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Kids will make you happier.

Lee Rosen: Mmm.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: So I think that a lot of people feel like, well, if we have this other element in our life, it will change us; it will bring us closer; it will solve our problems.

And you know, having kids really can strengthen your love for one another because you see each other in a new loving kind of way and you see the nurturing come out in your partner. But having children is one of the most stressful events a couple can experience. And if you're already having problems, having kids just makes things more difficult. I mean, even people who are not having problems talk about the first year of having a child as the hardest year of their marriage.

So if you're thinking that having kids is going to fix your marriage, try counseling first.

Lee Rosen: Right. Yeah. I think the only people that would buy the idea that kids will make you happier are people that don't have kids.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Right.

Lee Rosen: I have a 13-year-old and a 16-year-Old and it's a tough time with teenagers.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Yes, it is.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Okay. Number five, the last piece of bad advice. What are you hearing from people?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: That you should be able to say whatever is on your mind at any time to your spouse, that you shouldn't have to filter yourself at all.

Well, we shouldn't say everything we're thinking to anyone because you have so many things going through your head that is not fit for public consumption. There's a difference between sharing your thoughts and your feelings, even the negative ones -- you should be able to say that you're disappointed or that you're not happy with something, but there's a difference between that and saying everything that pops into your head. You have to have a filter to stop yourself from saying things that are contemptuous, overly critical or painful kinds of things.

My rule is, if it's something that you would be embarrassed to admit that you said later, then you probably shouldn't say it.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Try writing it in a journal. Say it to a friend who is just going to go, "Oh, make sure you don't say that to your partner." It doesn't mean that you have to stifle it, but find some other way to get it out so that you can say it more appropriately later.

Lee Rosen: Right. And when she asks, "Do I look fat in this?" the answer is always no.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: The answer's always no.

Lee Rosen: "No, that looks great."

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: It could be, "You know, I like that other dress on you better. It brings out the color in your eyes a little bit better," or something like that.

Lee Rosen: Right. But you definitely don't look fat in that.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: No.

Lee Rosen: I hear you. Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. And do you -- so you have folks sitting in the office with you who come in that really feel like, hey, these are things we've read; these are things we've heard; we've tried them and they're not working. And they're coming to you when it's not working.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Yes. Absolutely. I think that they get really -- again, it's just kind of that sense of disappointment that, well, I'm doing these things that my parents told me I should do, my friends told me I should do, I read in -- no hit on *Psychology Today*, but they're not always giving you the full picture in those kinds of magazines.

And so being able to kind of take everything that you read like that with a grain of salt of where is it coming from and is there more to this story?

Lee Rosen: Well, you know, I'm curious and I want to ask you in a sec about what are the right pieces of advice, if there are a few things that really are good advice that get passed around. But if these magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and all that, if they are sort of telling you things that don't really help -- or at least sometimes don't really help -- are there good magazines or books to turn to, or websites where you can get advice you can really trust?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Sure. I think that there are really good websites that are government-based or that are university-based. So like the Harvard Mental Health Letter has wonderful newsletters that come out every month or every two months.

And the Department of Human and Health Services and the National Alliance on Mental Illness and those kinds of things that are big organizations that are dedicated to working with families, working on issues of mental health, they're going to really be talking about things in a research, scientifically-based kind of way.

Lee Rosen: They're not just trying to sell magazines.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: It's not as fun to read, though.

Lee Rosen: Right. It's not fun and they're not trying to sell magazines --

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Right.

Lee Rosen: -- but they're giving you research-based, solid information.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Right. But I do think that there are some really good books. If you just go to Barnes & Noble and you want to find a book rather than a magazine, the good books -- the things to look for are who are the authors? Are they experts in their field? Do they have a degree that's pertinent to that field or are they kind of just an author who is saying, "These are things that I think"?

Lee Rosen: Right. My personal opinion.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Right.

Lee Rosen: Well, and I think we do forget. I mean, we think of psychology as being kind of a -- we don't really think of it as being an academic sort of thing where there's -- we think of it as like, hey, you're good with people. But really, you're doing science in your office. I mean, I think we laypeople, we kind of lose track of that.

So, okay. What are the pieces of good advice that you think really should be replacing these things that are apparently just terrible advice?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Well, speaking of a good resource, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* is written by John Gottman and he is like the premier psychologist in the field for family and couples work.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: And so what he talks about are these seven different principles of spending time to get to know your partner because we kind of lose that after the courting stage. We forget to ask about what's going on with our partner. What are they thinking? What are they experiencing?

Turning towards one another rather than away, and actually doing that in a physical way. So rather than asking a question while you're cooking dinner or while you're watching TV -- not that there's anything wrong with that from time to time, but just making sure that you are making eye contact and looking at one another.

Nurturing your fondness and admiration for your partner. So again, kind of getting back to that, what were you looking for in the courting stage?

Solving your solvable problems, working on things that you actually can do something about.

Overcoming gridlock. So when you get really stuck on something, finding a way -- whether it's that you go to counseling or you get an outside opinion. We really need to take care of this and not get stuck in this.

And then the really fun part I think is create shared meaning, so doing things together that this is a new memory for us. It doesn't all have to be about stuff that we did together when we were dating. We get to do fun stuff now. And even if that shared meaning is now we're in the almost drudgery of raising our family and going to work kind of stage of life, that that can still be very important and meaningful part of our existence together.

Lee Rosen: Right. So Gottman is kind of the guru out there and you're a big fan of his works. I have heard nothing but good things about him. Do you have a lot of your patients -- do they go through his material? Is that something that is done fairly commonly?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Yes. He's excellent.

Lee Rosen: Yeah.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: He's wonderful. I always recommend that people read his material.

Lee Rosen: Terrific. Well, I feel like we've gotten rid of some bad advice, replaced it with some good advice and given folks some leads and ideas about places to go to get even more help. Anything else we need to throw into the mix as we wrap up the worst marriage advice ever?

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: I think if it sounds suspicious, you should pay attention to your intuition.

Lee Rosen: Right. Makes a lot of sense. It makes a lot of sense. You're right. When we go back and we look at these five pieces of bad advice, when you start thinking about them it does kind of defy common sense in a lot of ways.

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Well, Katrina, thank you so much for taking the time to come here and talk with us today. I appreciate it.

Dr. Kuzyszyn-Jones: Sure. It was my pleasure.

Lee Rosen: Y'all ought to check out Katrina's website and her bio and all of that, LepageAssociates.com. I will put a link to it in the show notes. You can reach her at her office in Durham, North Carolina at (919) 572-0000.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope that you will join us again next week. In the meantime, we'd love to hear your comments, your feedback, your suggestions, your ideas, you name it. We love hearing from you. We respond to every message and every e-mail.

Two ways to get a hold of us. The comment line is (919) 256-3083. The e-mail address is 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.