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## Creating a Couple Vision Statement

*This is Stay Happily Married #130, "Creating a Couple Vision Statement."*

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Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. And I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Do you sometimes feel like you and your partner aren't working toward the same goals in your relationship? Does it seem like you're just not on the same page with each other?

I'm here by telephone with Dr. Carol Ummel Lindquist. She's a licensed clinical psychologist in Laguna Beach, California. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and she's had intensive postgraduate training in couples therapy from Couples Institute in Menlo Park and the Masters and Johnson Institute.

She's married with two kids -- one biological, one adopted. She knows both the ups and the downs of married life firsthand. She's been practicing therapy and coaching for 30 years and recently retired as a professor emerita from California State Fullerton. She's had the time to do a whole lot of great community work, including working some weekends at a Mexican orphanage.

Carol, welcome to the show.

Carol Lindquist: Well, thank you. I'm delighted to be here.

Lee Rosen: Well, the whole idea of a vision statement, I mean, that's a phrase that I'm very familiar with in terms of business vision statements. I mean, I've heard that a lot and you see that publicized with things

and I want to kind of dig into that with you. What are we talking about when we talk about a couple vision statement?

Carol Lindquist: Well, it is sort of like a business plan but it's more of a lifestyle plan for people to get themselves on the same page about a lot of issues that couples argue about or get on the opposite side with each other and try to constantly push against each other.

Lee Rosen: Well, I'm sure something caused you to think through this and come up with this approach. What was it -- what kind of issues were you seeing with couples? What were they facing that this is all about trying to deal with or overcome?

Carol Lindquist: Well, couples can differ in several areas. They differ about how to raise kids. They differ about how to spend money and whether to save it or spend it now. And there are about 10 issues that couples push and pull with each other -- how often to have sex, how much affection to have.

So this is sort of trying to get out front and asking them to put out on the table what they want instead of criticizing each other about how it's not what they thought it would be.

Lee Rosen: Okay. Well, that makes sense. So it really is a lot like the whole business thing that people are doing. What do they do? How do they come up with it? Or what do you do with folks to help them to get a vision statement like this?

Carol Lindquist: Well, since I know a lot of the questions that people fight about and have differences of opinion about, what I ask them to do is instead of trying to persuade somebody to do it their way, just to write down what it is they'd like to have. So I give them a list of questions like, how does your life match your dreams? Are you good with money? What projects have you done? And I ask them to just think about them in terms of themselves and their marriage.

And then I have a process that I run them through that I invite them to go through spending a weekend together or three evenings spread over a different amount of time, depending on their commitments with their kids.

Lee Rosen: Okay. And so what do they end up with when they're all done? Give me a feel for what one of these things is like.

Carol Lindquist: Well, every one is as unique as every couple. So some of them it comes out and it looks like a business thing and it's gorgeous and it's all typed up. Other people it comes out more as a very focused

affirmation, short, like, "We're going to be a good problem solving family." I mean, it may be very simple, but it distills to them the meaning of what their commitment is together.

So I don't really -- the outcome is not as important to me. Some people just come up with the next step in a list of -- they have a list of goals and a next step.

Lee Rosen: Right. That's what I was kind of going to ask you. I was like, is it really the process or the product that matters most in terms of turning the relationship around? It sounds like it's really the process, huh?

Carol Lindquist: The process is very, very important. That's why I spend as much time on the process as I do on the outcome.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Carol Lindquist: I want them to learn to work together.

Lee Rosen: Right. Makes sense. Are you seeing people do this vision statement process -- are they doing it with your help or are they doing it on their own?

Carol Lindquist: Well, I have a typed out thing that I give people to try to do on their own And if they get stuck, then I help them with it.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Carol Lindquist: But I really have written it out in a way that I'm hoping they can do it. Because it's a very private thing and if they're a fairly functional couple they can do it themselves. And if they get stuck, then I'm there to help them.

Lee Rosen: Right. Now, I read something on your website about overnight sessions. Is that something they're doing with you?

Carol Lindquist: No. I encourage them to have somebody watch the kids and step away from their day to day life and do this in three segments and break it up by doing fun things together so that it's -- the process itself is a lot of fun.

Lee Rosen: Right. Are people reporting back to you that they really are having a lot of fun doing it?

Carol Lindquist: Yeah. What usually happens is that they say they're going to do it and they don't do it at first and they hold off and they sort of -- you

know how people's ambivalences are. And then they do it and they have a lot of fun with it.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, so let's say I wanted to do this -- not this weekend because my wife's out of town. Although I think we could really get the vision straight if she wasn't in the way. But let's say I wanted to do this next weekend. Give me a feel. How would I do this step by step to get from where I am now to having one of these vision statements in hand, ready to roll?

Carol Lindquist: Well, the first thing I ask you to do is before you do it, make an appreciation list. What do you like about your partner? What do you like about your marriage? And what do you like about your life? And this list is many things that you're grateful for, the words to remind you.

And then I ask them to do a dreams list, which is seven words or seven things that represent a happy family life to you. And these can be small and silly or really meaningful to you.

And I ask them to think about their values, a list of words that represent values that are very important in your life.

And then I have you do a list of goals that you want to achieve in life. And these goals can be both -- what we call in psychology -- process goals, like I'd like to be able to communicate really well with my partner would be more of a how-we-do-it goal; or it could be we want to travel to Hawaii next year. It can be very concrete or it can be a process type of goal.

Then the first time block, which is usually the first evening if you're doing an overnight, the main thing I want you to do is just share the positives with each other on the different lists and listen to each other and take it in.

And then the second day, after you've done the positives, what we do is find a comfortable, private place where you won't be interrupted and try to put your list together. Some couples will use a computer. Some couples will use butcher paper, like they do for a lot of business ones. And combine your lists; list yours and theirs and put them -- every place that they're together you sort of circle those. And you try to -- and some people use a dry-erase board.

You try to use your best communication skills, try to stay really positive and not criticize even the most -- if I want to circle the globe in a sailboat and you get seasick, no criticism. You just list it and listen.

And then take a fun break, do something physical if you can that you like -- hiking, playing tennis, whatever, whatever.

Then the third time block is your follow-up where you actually start trying to prioritize the order in which you might do things and discuss how you can support each other, how you can work together, how you might pay for it, which things would work in financially.

And then you make a time that you'll follow it up. So it could be in a month or six months we're going to get back together and kind of go through the process again and see what we got done and where it fell apart.

Lee Rosen: Okay. So that's kind of a Friday night, Saturday, Sunday. And you walk out with a plan for how you're going to implement these things you've agreed upon, it sounds like.

Carol Lindquist: Right. And I the last thing I encourage them to do is to celebrate that they did it, because it takes a lot of concentration and working together to get it done.

Lee Rosen: Right. Is your thinking that this approach works well for -- obviously it would work well for couples that are already doing well. Does it work for couples that are struggling?

Carol Lindquist: It does and it doesn't. There are a couple -- if it's a physically abusive or verbally abusive couple, it's hard to keep them in the same room together without them breaking out in a fight; they're not going to be able to do something like this.

If it's a couple that's been going through counseling and they've gotten to sort of where they're ready to move on to an advanced stage, yes, they can do it. If it's a couple that's high-functioning, they could do it.

But it sometimes has -- if you have a more low-level of conflict and you have a lot of little things that don't quite seem to gel, doing this can help you see that you're on the same team and can -- just the way that a retreat for a business can get it back on track, this'll get a couple back on track.

But it is too much for a couple that's, as I said, engaged in physical violence or domestic violence or alcohol abuse, things that really prevent communication of any kind.

Lee Rosen: Right. I'm curious, how did you come up with this idea? Where did it emanate from?

Carol Lindquist: Well, it emanated -- it just sort of brings together a lot of different things that I work on. There are five stages in a marriage and you need some way to transition from the level at which everybody says, who the heck have I married, to a more blissful on the same time kind of thing at the fifth stage. So I was looking for things that actually -- the bridge would be there.

And I sort of combined a lot of people's ideas about this. I couldn't find anything that I exactly liked. I combined a bunch of people's ideas about it. And I actually reference Philip Scherva [ph] and his wife for some of the ideas in here because I like their ideas.

Lee Rosen: Right. Why do you think it works? What is the magic behind this formula?

Carol Lindquist: Well, in marriages everybody goes through this "who the heck have I married?" -- this stage two. And they have to -- and they go through an "I'm going to change you." If you just do things my way, we'd be a happy couple. If I do a talk and I say, "Everybody who's thought if they just did it my way we'd be happy," everybody raises their hand.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Carol Lindquist: So the idea was to help them begin to see themselves as a working team, both on the same side, going in the same direction; rather than two people that are pulling at each other, trying to get the other person to do it their way.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, we've covered a lot of ground and I'm really -- I think it's a great idea and a great plan and I want to give people some ideas about finding resources and information about you and about the couples vision statement. But is there anything else that we ought to add to this? Anything else you feel like is important for folks to know?

Carol Lindquist: Well, there's some deeper questions and details about it, but, no, I don't think there's anything else I would add. I think you've asked very good questions.

Lee Rosen: All right. Well, I appreciate you taking the time to explain it all to us. Let me direct people to your website. Carol's got a great website at [cullagunabeach.com](http://cullagunabeach.com). I'll put a link to that in the show notes as

well. And she's got all sorts of resources there for people facing all sorts of issues and you should definitely check it out.

Now, let me tell you some exciting news. She has a brand-new book coming out, *Happy Couple Handbook*, that will be out in November. And we will put a link to that as well once it's out. So you should check it out because good ideas, good stuff.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope that you will join us again next week. In the meantime, we love to hear your feedback and comments. You can reach us at the comment line at (919) 256-3083 or you can e-mail us at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com).

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

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