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## **It's Complicated: Facebook and Your Marriage**

*This is Stay Happily Married #142, "It's Complicated: Facebook and Your Marriage."*

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Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. It's almost impossible anymore to go a single day without hearing about Facebook. And unfortunately, a lot of what we hear is about the part it can play in ending a marriage. Does it feel like Facebook is actually driving you and your partner apart? Or are you worrying about its potential to do that?

I have on line with me today K. Jason and Kelli Krafsky, known as the "social media couple." Jason has over a decade of experience writing on marriage and leading training programs for ministers and counselors in marriage issues. He and Kelli have been married for more than 15 years and together they've written all kinds of articles on marriage, including articles about the effect of social media on relationships.

They've recently put out a book called *Facebook and Your Marriage*, and I want us to really delve into the impact of Facebook and whether it can cause marriages to come to an end.

Jason, Kelli, welcome to the program. How are you doing?

K. Jason Krafsky: Doing great.

Kelli Krafsky: We're doing good. Thank you.

Lee Rosen: Good. Good. Now, you're writing about Facebook. What got you started with that? What drove you to put out a book about *Facebook and Your Marriage*?

K. Jason Krafsky: Well, for us, we've been on Facebook since 2008 and really enjoyed everything that you could do with Facebook, as far as connecting with people and staying in touch with people that are long distance and that kind of thing.

And in the midst of that, Kelli and I -- we were 14 years into marriage at that time, have a strong marriage, have been intentional about our marriage, and we both had kind of come to discover that we had friended some exes from way, way back in our past, because you just kind of get through that flurry of getting friend requests and sending friend requests and you're just excited to see new people and old people and all that.

But it was when Kelli one day had come downstairs and said, "Hey, Jason, guess who I found on Facebook and I friended?"

And I said, "Who? Who?"

She said, "My first love."

And it's at that point that all of a sudden you realize, oh, my gosh, we don't have boundaries -- you know, we have firm boundaries in our physical life, things that we won't do with people of the opposite sex. We won't meet with them alone. We won't drive in a car with them alone.

But all of a sudden, here on Facebook we're now starting to interact with ex-boyfriends and girlfriends, people we had an emotional past with. And just thought, you know, being in the marriage field, I don't think this is a really great idea.

And so it got us going and talking about some of our own boundaries and the guardrails that we felt like maybe we need to have now that Facebook was moving from novelty to a regular part of our life.

And as we get discussing that and working through that, we realized, wow, there's a lot of other couples who don't have the skills and the background that we do. How many more couples out there are going through the very same thing that we are? Because we weren't expecting it to happen; we were kind of blindsided by it.

So wrote some articles and got a ton of response off that and realized, wow, this is a much bigger issue than we ever realized. So that's kind of how we --

Lee Rosen: Right.

K. Jason Krafsky: -- got into it, in a nutshell.

Lee Rosen: Do you think that this whole idea of friending your ex, is that the thing that most people are the most worried about? Or are there other issues that go on with Facebook?

Kelli Krafsky: There's definitely other issues involved. Time is obviously a big concern amongst couples of how much time do you spend on Facebook? And with that, are you neglecting your spouse or your kids?

Lee Rosen: Right. That is an issue.

K. Jason Krafsky: There's other things, like people just being jealous or anxious about who they are friending. Whether or not they're an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, we've heard from some spouses that, "Hey, it seems like my husband, all he's doing is commenting and interacting with women that he meets on Facebook. There's not a lot of men in his life -- or even on his friend list on Facebook." So some jealousies and anxieties there as well.

Lee Rosen: Do you think that Facebook is really that big a risk to marriages? Or do you think that maybe this is one of those things like the shark attacks a few years ago, that the media just blows this out of proportion? How big a deal is it really?

K. Jason Krafsky: Well, there are some sensationalized stories out there. And you've heard the thing that says that 20 percent of all divorces involve Facebook, and that's way overstated.

But when you have 600 million people on a social network and most of that growth has happened in the last two-and-a-half years, yeah, there's some problems and issues, because being part of an online social network is a brand-new experience for many of us. In fact, for most of us it's our first time being on this kind of -- in this kind of an online community and it does really bring up some new issues, some new scenarios, some new challenges that couples do need to face.

And so if you're making -- you have real people making real connections with real people, this can really trigger some real issues for couples.

But where the threat really manifests isn't so much what's happening online, but what happens offline. So how does a couple talk about their concern that, "Hey, I think you're spending too much time on Facebook"? Or, "I think the people you're interacting with or friending aren't really the greatest people in the world." Or, "Hey, I'm really concerned about this ex."

What we find is that once the problem is presented, it can really blow up, gets emotional, it gets heated, and now there's more problems to have to deal with, more so than just the Facebook situation.

Lee Rosen: Do we have to just assume that Facebook is an inevitable part of our lives now? I mean, can't we just decide as a couple to forget about it, we're going to delete our accounts and walk away?

Kelli Krafsky: I don't believe so. I think that Facebook has definitely become a part of our everyday life. We believe that it is as big as the invention of the television. You're finding that companies and businesses, they're marketing on Facebook. They're promoting their goods and their services. It's become like the scrapbook for families and friends.

So I mean, there's so much good that Facebook can do and can help us all stay connected. But it's just a matter of people need to realize that with getting on here we do need to set some kind of ground rules or some kind of boundaries so that our relationships can stay intact.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. I guess you're right. I mean, it really is -- it does feel today like it's almost replacing the telephone in a lot of ways. I mean, it's more than that; it's the telephone on steroids. Yeah.

Kelli Krafsky: It's like a telephone in 3-D.

Lee Rosen: So what do you recommend? I mean, you're the experts. You've thought about this. What do you suggest that people do if they're worried about their partner and what they're doing on Facebook?

K. Jason Krafsky: Well, the first thing that the spouse needs to do is just kind of think about what they're concerned about. Some of the stories we've heard is that they feel threatened and so they pounce on it. They really lack the conflict management skills and the shared

boundaries, which end up creating more problems than solutions. So step back and really think about your concern.

When Kelli brought up the fact that she had friended her first love, that had a shocking effect on me. But I didn't -- I couldn't really articulate what was I feeling; what was going through my head when she said that. And then I started realizing, wow, you know what? I had friended some exes of my own and, though I wasn't really interacting with them, they were there.

And so think through the concern. What specifically is that concern? Are you feeling threatened? Are you feeling anxious? Are you feeling jealous? Are you feeling --

Kelli Krafsky: Insecure.

K. Jason Krafsky: -- hurt or insecure? And be able to express how that makes you feel. And then what are some possible solutions? Because often times we -- as one spouse or another, we're just dumping problems but not dumping solutions. That can really create some problems as well.

And so once you've got it kind of figured out, then find a time where you and your spouse can get away from the computer, get away from your smartphones and kind of break the online experience so that you can go offline and really talk this through and be able to share your concerns calmly, be able to state how that feels, share your solutions, and allow them an opportunity to kind of process this.

When I brought up my concern with Kelli a couple days later, it opened up a door for us to talk over a series of weeks to really kind of come to a resolution not only just on this one issue but really think through and talk through other boundaries and ground rules.

And in our book *Facebook and Your Marriage*, we have a whole section that helps couples kind of walk through and talk through these kinds of things without it blowing up into World War III.

Lee Rosen: So you want people to talk about it in person and not use their phones, using the Facebook messaging function?

K. Jason Krafsky: Right.

Kelli Krafsky: Yeah, no.

K. Jason Krafsky: If you're chatting online or IM'ing or texting or e-mailing and that's the only way you can deal with problems, which we have heard from

couples about, then you really need to get yourself into a communication skills class or a conflict resolution class and learn how to do that face-to-face.

Kelli Krafsky: That means there's other issues.

Lee Rosen: Right. It is funny because I have in fact communicated with my wife over the instant messenger on Facebook and it does -- I mean, I communicate with my kids more on Facebook, I think, than I do in person.

K. Jason Krafsky: Yeah.

Kelli Krafsky: Well, and it's a great way to flirt with your spouse.

Lee Rosen: Right. Do you still have, Kelli, that ex-boyfriend as a friend on Facebook?

Kelli Krafsky: No, no. You know, it was interesting because I naïvely came running down the stairs announcing this to Jason. So we laugh about it now because I couldn't quite understand why he wasn't as excited as I was.

But all I have to say, when he did come to me and ask me, "You know, I'm really not comfortable with this friendship; I really think that you should de-friend him," I was defensive because I thought, oh, my word, this was 20 years ago. It's not a big deal. You shouldn't feel threatened, and on and on and on. And it took me a couple of days to realize that you know what? There really is nothing positive that can come out of me re-establishing this friendship after all those years.

So I de-friended him. Jason went back and he de-friended any of his past attachments as well. And we just said right then and there, this is our firm boundary; we just do not friend exes or anybody that we've had an emotional attachment with. And that could even mean like a crush. Because we just thought, you know what? That's just not anything that's positive for our marriage to go forward.

Lee Rosen: Right. So is that your advice for others, that they really shouldn't even start down that path with those people?

Kelli Krafsky: Absolutely. And we actually -- we have friends who we've gotten into some discussions with on this. They seem to think that it's okay. And you know, we can give the message and let the know our concerns about it, but we truly feel that anybody who puts

themselves in this situation, you really are two to three clicks away from making a really poor decision.

Lee Rosen: Right. That makes a lot of sense. I love the way you put that, "You're two or three clicks away from making a really bad decision." That makes a lot of sense.

So what other issues are you seeing that you're giving people advice about? Aside from not friending the exes and the old romantic flames, what other kind of rules for the road are there on Facebook?

Kelli Krafsky: Well, one of our big immediate rules is we tell couples that you need to share your user name and your password with each other. And it's not so that you can go and spy on each other and go onto their account, it's more of to have that instant accountability amongst the two of you.

Now, you'll have people say that, "Oh, we've got trust in our marriage; we don't need to do that." Yeah, you do. Because one of the -- we are all susceptible to anything bad happening. And so we just decided, you know what? Let's just share our user name and password. And we also believe that we do that as well with our teenagers. Just so that you know we're there to kind of be able to check up on each other and just know that there is that instant accountability.

Lee Rosen: That's good advice. Very good advice. Now, you know, there's all this press about the negative things from Facebook and its impact on marriage. Do you think there's anything that Facebook does that enhances a marriage? Is there anything positive coming out of it from a marriage standpoint?

K. Jason Krafsky: Yeah. Absolutely. We're talking to couples and finding that they're seeing this is a new way to kind of connect -- to stay connected throughout the day -- one's at work, one's at home, or they're both at their own jobs. And they're just able to kind of keep up on how each other's doing, be able to post some things on the Web saying, hey, I'm thinking of you today.

And the beauty is, is with Facebook -- rather than as, say, a text -- is that others are seeing it and they're kind of contributing to it, saying, "Oh, that's so cute," or "Oh, that's so nice." And it has a contagious effect where you'll see somebody post something and then almost kind of a domino effect that their friends say, oh, I should probably post something like that on my spouse's wall too and get some points. And so it really has this share-the-love effect that occurs.



But we also talk to couples where they use this as a way to just kind of fill their spouse's love tank. If they're into getting words of affirmation or that kind of thing, just sharing nice things about your spouse and what they've done or why you love them or why you care for them or how incredible they are and making that part of your status update maybe once or twice a week.

And again, this is sort of a way to shout to everybody that, hey, I'm married and -- married to a great gal or married to a great guy, and do some great things.

And then as Kelli said, using the chat or inbox as a way to flirt with one another. And then one recent development with Facebook is that you can set up a secret group. And you can set it up so that it's just you and your spouse. This is ideal for couples where there's a lot of traveling going on in their business. So only the two of them can see what's being posted. Nobody can find out about this group; it's an invite-only kind of group.

And so what it does is it allows couples when they are away from one another to post things on Facebook on their own personal space, everything from the sweet nothings to talking about -- some things may be going on in their home or in their life that they need some privacy on but they also need to be interacting with. They can be posting pictures and videos and just really kind of use it as their own personal space.

And so that's really exciting, especially for some military personnel that we were talking with not too long back where husband is in Afghanistan fighting a war and spouse is back home and they're gone for six, nine months. Facebook is sort of a lifeline to keep them connected.

And the beauty with these secret groups is it allows them to really be a couple without having to worry about being too -- displaying too much PDA, so to speak, on Facebook.

Lee Rosen: Right. Oh, that is a great idea. I really think that is terrific. Your comment earlier about one person seeing the other saying something nice to their spouse on the wall, you're really upping the game there. You're putting a lot of pressure on some of us. But I guess that's a good pressure to have on us, so that's okay.

K. Jason Krafsky: Well, if you friend me, you can just copy and paste some of my updates and win some points.



Kelli Krafsky: Yeah.

Lee Rosen: That's a good idea. That is a great idea. Yeah, you just give me one every day and I'll post it. That is fantastic.

Listen, in your book -- in *Facebook and Your Marriage*, is it geared more for people that are new to social networking, people that don't have a lot of Facebook experience?

K. Jason Krafsky: No. The book itself is written in sort of a Dear Abby meets Facebook kind of way. Very visual, very fast-paced. The idea is that there's 125 different questions that we've come across over the years and try to answer those in a very fluid and easy way.

We've had people who have started their Facebook account with that book open and kind of walking through how to set it up and set it up right. We've had people who are veteran users of Facebook who have gotten some great input and tips from it.

And then we just got a note from a newlywed couple the other day that they were having an argument sparked by a friend request and they opened up the book and read through some of the responses that we give on that and were able to kind of talk it through. And they were able to use some of the skills that we share in the last section of the book to really talk through it calmly. And it didn't end up being this heated shout-through-the-roof kind of situation. It was dealt with. They were able to come together on it. They were able to share and really work through it.

So it really is geared for the newbie, the experienced Facebooker, but most importantly it's for every married Facebooker, something that they need because they will run into these situations sooner or later.

Lee Rosen: Right. It sounds like it would be a great gift for a newlywed as well, a wedding gift.

K. Jason Krafsky: Yeah. We've had that a lot.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Well, it's funny because I think in premarital counseling you figure out things like how we're going to manage money and whether we're going to have kids and all that. And now we've got to figure out what to do about Facebook. So that'll be a new topic for us all to figure out.

Kelli Krafsky: Yeah. And we did just talk with somebody not too long ago that they were engaged and getting married and they actually had to sit down

and go through their friend lists together and kind of talk about how they knew each other. And we even tell married couples to do this from time to time just to get to know your spouse better.

But it was interesting that that was a process that this couple, before they got married, were kind of going through the lists. And what a great time to maybe get rid of some of those old attachments. Start the marriage off fresh.

Lee Rosen: Right. We're going to have to do another book for all the people that have been de-friended and their feelings of rejection, but that's for another day.

Jason and Kelli, thank you so much. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with us today. Thank you so much.

K. Jason Krafsky: Thank you.

Kelli Krafsky: Absolutely.

Lee Rosen: You know, you all should definitely check out their website. Jason and Kelli are at [SocialMediaCouple.com](http://SocialMediaCouple.com). And you can find out about the book *Facebook and Your Marriage*, all sorts of resources at the site. You can find the book at -- everywhere -- Amazon, Borders, Barnes & Noble, online and in the stores.

And I really think this may be one you want to add to your library because we're all using Facebook. I mean, you can't deny it. I don't know anybody that's not having Facebook touch their life in one way or another. And we've all had that ex-girlfriend or boyfriend friend us. And if you're not thinking about those issues, you may be headed for trouble.

Thank you so much for listening today. I hope that you will join us again next week. In the meantime, we love to get you feedback and your comments. You can reach us by calling the comment line at (919) 256-3083; we have a voicemail box there for you. 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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