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Where's My Fairy Tale Ending?

This is Stay Happily Married #143, "Where's My Fairy Tale Ending?"

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.

Ned Daze: I'm Ned Daze and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. You know, stories of riding off from your wedding and living happily ever after are all well and good, but we know that that isn't how things work out in real life. If you do have those kinds of unrealistic expectations, it's easy to feel disappointed when married life isn't the fairy tale that you were promised as a kid.

Jon and Beverly Meyerson are here today to talk about the difference between expectation and reality, and what you can start doing today to build up your marriage on trust and intimacy.

Jon and Beverly have helped hundreds of couples with their marriages. Jon is a licensed clinical social worker; Beverly is a relationship coach. And they are the authors of the book *After the Glass Slipper: 8 Proven Steps to Lasting Love*.

Jon and Beverly, welcome to the show. I'm so glad you could join us today.

Jon Meyerson: Thank you for having us.

Beverly Meyerson: Nice to be here.

Ned Daze: Excellent. Well you know, I'm really excited about this. I think this is going to be a really excellent topic because I know before marriage a lot of people often think, wow, this is – they're in this

great honeymoon period and everything seems great and everybody's going along at full steam. And then it seems like once the honeymoon is over and once the first year or so are done with the marriage, things really start – reality sets in, I guess is what I'm saying, and people kind of get a different spin on things.

And I guess that's kind of what the book is about, is that correct?

Jon Meyerson: That's correct. In the book we teach couples new skills in communication so they can get along better. And most couples who have gone through the romantic stage need this when reality does set in.

Ned Daze: Right. Well, I'm wondering, when you're writing this book – and you guys have an advice column as well that people can sign up for on the website. I want to mention that at the end of the show.

But when you're writing these, I'm wondering who's the ideal couple you have in mind? Is this somebody who's about to get married? Somebody who's been married for a little while but still fairly new in their marriage? Somebody who's been married for a long time? Who are you writing this for?

Jon Meyerson: All couples benefit by developing new skills, and that's what we provide. And when we say "couples," romantic couples might include premarital couples, couples who have been married as long as 48 years – as we've worked with couples who've been married that long – and gay couples, straight couples. And it also helps for platonic relationships in getting along with your family.

Ned Daze: Excellent. Well, I'm wondering – I think I know the answer to this, but I'm wondering how often do you find that people are entering into marriage with unrealistic expectations? I'm guessing you're going to say 100 percent, but correct me if I'm wrong.

Beverly Meyerson: Well, I think that nowadays that many young couples are concerned about marriage. And that might be why they're not even necessarily so young when they get married. They wait longer. When we were married years ago, it was if you're not married by 21 or so then that's it. But they do wait longer. Their careers are important.

And I think that, unfortunately – well, the other thing is that some of their parents have divorced. So that scares them. So I think that, unfortunately, that many of them get married just based on their initial chemistry of being in love and it's romantic and it's going to always be like this. And then when things start to settle down it

becomes a little bit different. They really get to see what the other one is like when there's stress involved and just daily living.

Ned Daze: Right. Well, I'm wondering how does this look? This has got to be very difficult for some people to kind of get a grasp of when things aren't how it was when they were dating or how it was right during the kind of honeymoon period. How does this impact the relationship when they go in expecting this kind of Hollywood storybook romance for the rest of their lives and then all of a sudden they realize, oh, right, I've got to take out the trash and we've got to deal with bills and getting the kids to school? What happens when people make that realization?

Jon Meyerson: Well, they are often disappointed, unfortunately. They think if they – most couples feel, well, if I pick the right person everything will work out fine. Even if they've gone through other relationships, they find, well, this is going to be different. And unless they matured and understand fully that marriage is work, it's not just all glory that they had when they were threw their romance, they will be disappointed.

But over the years I think what we've found, the couples we worked with and the couples we've known start accepting the fact that they can work to get long-term love that they really desire. And by doing that, it's much more important and much deeper than even the romantic part of their relationship.

Ned Daze: Right. You know, you mentioned people kind of end up being disappointed. Do you see a lot of people when they're disillusioned like that, do they start to think, oh, no – I want to kind of go into this "did I marry the right person?" Do you get that a lot? Do people think all of a sudden after the honeymoon's over, oh, maybe this wasn't the right person? And does it really exist – the perfect person?

Jon Meyerson: Exactly. And what happens is – well, first of all, we tell them during first marriages the divorce rate is about 50 percent. But when you go into second marriages it goes up to about 65 percent. And it's almost never the fact that they married the wrong person; it's the fact that they haven't learned to listen to the person and communicate in such a way that they can hear each other.

And that's what our writing does. It teaches them how to listen, how to validate and understand each other.

Beverly Meyerson: In getting back to your question, too, about how they – well, when they come into the office and how they feel, they're usually

devastated. And they think that their situation is worse than everybody else's. And then we assure them that we've seen it all and that they're really pretty average as far as things that come up and disagreements and that sort of thing.

But the other part of this too is that opposites tend to attract. And you'll get somebody in where, let's say, the woman is what we call more of a maximizer and she might be bubbly and exciting and lots of energy, and maybe the guy is just – is more introspective and quiet and he's on the computer all the time type of thing. And they really attract each other at the beginning because, let's face it, it's hard to have two people with all that energy or two people who are very introverted, for instance. So it's great at the beginning and that's where that chemistry is wonderful.

But then when they realize that – he realizes that she's on the phone all the time with her friends or she realizes he's on the computer, they don't feel like they're number one anymore. And they see things differently. Actually, things haven't changed all that much, but they see it differently. And it's disappointing.

Jon Meyerson:

And couples go through three stages. Almost every couple goes through the romantic stage, where they can't eat or sleep without thinking of each other or writing their name on a piece of paper, and calling each other on their cell phones and texting each other. But that stops at some point. Nobody could exist for many years during the romantic stage.

Then they go into the power struggle that Beverly described, where they realize, hey, life isn't that way; we have to learn how to get along.

And then we try to teach them to go to the long-term love, where they start accepting each other for what they are and understand how to listen to each other, how to empathize, how to validate, even when there are differences of opinion. They understand that happens.

For example, we give examples of our own. Beverly likes to get to the airport two hours in advance. I like to get there 15 minutes in advance. And I know she's going to get anxious no matter what. So happens is I take a book and I say, well, I don't want her to get anxious. I can try to convince her a hundred ways to say the traffic will be light, we'll make it in time, but she's going to get anxious. So I empathize with her and understand her anxiety.

We get to the airport ahead. I read my book and then run for newspapers at the last minute, but she feels much more relaxed and our relationship is much more loving because of that.

Beverly Meyerson: But he's not resentful over this. That's really very important that he doesn't feel resentful. He's doing this for the relationship. Not just for me, but for us. It's better for him if I'm not anxious.

Ned Daze: Right. So let your wife have her way is basically the message I'm taking away from that.

Beverly Meyerson: Well, in that case. But there's many times when Jon feels very strongly about something that I could say, well, who cares?

Ned Daze: Right.

Beverly Meyerson: And I go along with it because there's no point in him being stressed either. So this is what we do for each other and that's what makes it work.

Ned Daze: Right. No, I think it's very interesting that you can kind of – because I think a lot of people, it seems like they want to stand their ground on issues. And really it's not that the issue matters to them, but it's like you say, they're in that power struggle kind of thing. It's no big deal to take a book and makes things a lot better.

So I want to – you know, I'm wondering, you guys help out a lot of couples who are in the midst of deciding, oh, gosh, did I really make the right decision with this? I'm wondering, what leads some couples to go to counseling and then others to avoid it? What are some of the factors that make some couples think, we need to do this; and the others that just think, we need to forget it or we can fix it ourselves?

Beverly Meyerson: Well, I think that some people feel when they come in that they're doing it just out of desperation and they want to fix the other person. I mean, everything that they're doing is basically right and the other person is really messed up. And that's their goal. And sometimes they just both feel like that there's no other way.

I think that when it appears at first that one person is really more at fault than the other it's interesting how after time we find that the one who didn't – that was being blamed – or the one that wasn't being blamed, I'm sorry – the one who was blaming the other actually enables the other one to do things that they don't like.

So I'm just trying to think of an example of this. I might – like for instance, if I want to get out of the house on time all the time and I know that Jon doesn't look at his watch and he waits around, he procrastinates and does things. So if I just let him do that and he's late, I can get angry. And then I bring him to counseling finally because I'm sick and tired of him waiting around and not being on time. But I'm enabling him to do that by not helping him out and maybe just giving him a gentle suggestion, "We're going to leave in five minutes." I mean, that's just an example of how people can enable each other to do what they don't want them to do.

And I just wanted to say too that what we try to teach couples is to have a conscious relationship. Most couples who come into our offices have an unconscious relationship, which means that they just go on – some people for decades – living parallel lives, like 2-year-olds, where they just kind of play side by side. They're not necessarily soul mates. They don't necessarily do many things together but they're married.

And unfortunately, there's a lot of couples like that. Many of our parents were like that. That's what marriage was. And people think, well, my parents were like that; I don't deserve any better.

But we really feel that once you start thinking of love in a conscious way and say to yourself, what is my part in this, instead of just looking at the other person saying, how can he change or what can he do differently?

And when people walk out of our office, that's what we want. We want them to say, okay, we've been through this now. What's my role now and what can I do?

Ned Daze: Excellent. I'm wondering, when they come in to see you and people are getting counseling, what are some of these things that they're going through after the honeymoon phase is over? What are some of the tell-tale signs when a couple comes in and you realize, oh, they're realizing that things aren't going to be all sunshine and lollipops from here on out?

Jon Meyerson: Most people, unfortunately, wait too long. They wait until the situation at home has gone from the cold to the pneumonia stage. And they say, oh, we have to go in or we're going to have to live this life in torment or split up. And then they come in.

We do have some couples who come for premarital counseling. And we love that happening because then they can protect themselves ahead of time and look for problems that might come up and take

advantage. But when they do come in, they – what we do is set the stage so that they can listen to each other in a way that's safe.

At home it doesn't work that one. One interrupts the other before they even finish the sentence and think what they're going to say. And what we do is have them mirror back what they're thinking, what they're feeling in a way that the other one can listen to it without using tough language and being much more relaxed in the office and feel safe. And that's the key.

Beverly Meyerson: Yeah, I think that's right. Safe and also being able to trust the other person. It's very hard to trust somebody when you feel like you're against each other a lot of the time. And trust can lead to a lot of other issues too. So the romance fades, the intimacy dwindles down to nothing. And so trust is really very critical in the relationship and I think that when people come in they're not feeling very trusting.

Ned Daze: Right. Well, that makes sense.

Beverly Meyerson: Yeah. And that's major.

Jon Meyerson: And one of the things that we do right away in the first session is ask them to guess why the other one has come in. And we spend a great deal of time on that because a lot of times they don't really know why the other person is in there. They think, oh, they're just angry at me for no reason at all. But when you get down to the bricks and mortars as to specific things, specific problems, a lot of times they can look and say, oh, I can fix that; that's not as big a deal as I thought.

Sometimes people come in and think the other partner came in to tell them that they want a divorce. And they're so relieved when they hear, oh, no, I love you; I want to stay with you. Then it changes the whole relationship immediately.

Ned Daze: Yeah, I would imagine that is a pretty big relief. And you know, I'm wondering are there things that people can do either outside of counseling or before they come to counseling to improve their relationship?

Beverly Meyerson: Well, again, getting back to that conscious relationship of just trying to really think about what is going on here when you have a situation happen. And instead of thinking that I'm angry with the other person, say – and why am I angry? I think that's what you have to do is say, why am I feeling my anger right now? And many times, believe it or not, the person who's the most angry is the one who's got a lot of issues going on.

So if somebody says something to their spouse about their weight and the spouse gets very upset, well, their weight might be an issue with them anyway and it might be a very simple question that really isn't meant to be nasty, but the person who's got the weight problem takes it that way.

It's like there's a magnifying glass between the two of them and the subject becomes magnified 100 times and the listener is feeling outraged by it and they start screaming because the other person mentions something about weight. So that person who feels so bad and defensive needs to say, what's going on with me right now and why am I reacting this way? I mean, that's certainly one thing that people can do. And again, that's part of having a conscious relationship and thinking about what you can do yourself.

Jon Meyerson: And our newsletter that comes out once a week is a free way of allowing couples to work on their relationship without counseling. We point out it's never about the clothes on the floor, it's never about how to load the dishwasher, although the conflicts might use words like that; it's about respect and understanding. And we provide them with specific ways to appreciate each other.

One appreciation a day is enough to help their relationship bloom. And we've known couples that go for years without saying one kind appreciation to each other. So just starting out by saying, "Boy, you look beautiful today," will change the person's demeanor for weeks sometimes.

Ned Daze: Yeah. Absolutely. Well, I'm wondering – we've taken a fairly positive look so far. Are there some couples that just aren't meant to be together, that can't live this happily ever after in the terms of the long-term love that we had talked about earlier?

Jon Meyerson: I think people are quick to say, "We're just not meant to be with each other." In the hundreds of couples we've worked with, there have been very few who we feel couldn't have a long-term loving relationship. In fact, they were attracted to each other for specific reasons that they loved at the beginning.

There are cases, sure, where a person is addicted to a substance or physically abusive or mentally abusive in such a way that they can't be lived with. But in most cases, couples who feel that this is not the right person will go on and they'll pick somebody very similar the next time – not the same – and then they'll realize, hey, wait, it wasn't the person; it was how I related to the person, how I listened, how I empathized.

Beverly Meyerson: Or didn't listen.

Jon Meyerson: Or didn't listen. Yeah. More cases. And how I talked and the words I used. But most couples – I'd say 95 percent of couples – can have a much better relationship over the years if they work at it.

Ned Daze: Right. Well, that's good news. Good news to hear. And you know, I want to get back to the book, *After the Glass Slipper*. You guys wrote it in a really unique way. It's kind of a behind-the-scenes look at the Cinderella and the Prince fairy tale marriage after the wedding.

And I'm wondering what do you think readers are going to get out of this approach that differs from the traditional step one, step two relationship book?

Beverly Meyerson: Well, we wrote the book because we would suggest books for couples – relationship books – and we found that they would start to read them but didn't get very far. They're just long how-to books and they just couldn't get into it. So we thought we would try something a little different.

And it's basically a novel, but on the other hand it has – it's chock-full of advice. And what we did was we took eight conflicts, out of the many conflicts that we've seen with hundreds of couples over the years, and we put them into eight awarenesses in this book. And it's about Cinderella and the Prince, what happens after they get married.

And four of those conflicts tend to be more her thing and four of them are more his problems. But when each of them has a problem – and it's all described in there so that people can relate to it.

So if she has a problem, the Fairy Godmother will come down and give her advice with poetry, which is kind of fun. And there's humor in the book as well. And then when the Prince – we call him Prince – has a problem, a new character, the Caring Godfather, comes in and gives him advice and poetry.

So it reads very quickly, in about an hour and a half or so. At the end of each chapter there's a little synopsis, which is something that the therapist would be telling you, basically.

But what we find is that particularly the men, which is interesting, who don't like this sort of thing really get into the story. And then they actually relate to the conflict. "Yeah, yeah. That's what she

does." Or, "That's what my problem is." And so they go along with the story and they stick with it and they actually learn something from it at the same time as enjoying it.

Jon Meyerson: Yeah. We found this indirect approach is really enjoyed by most people. They don't feel they're reading a book that's telling them all the wrong things they're doing. They see some of the problems that Cinderella and Prince are doing.

And we cover the eight major areas that we see regularly: finances –

Beverly Meyerson: Relatives.

Jon Meyerson: – physical intimacy, conflict with relatives –

Beverly Meyerson: Different values.

Jon Meyerson: – time spent away. And we've had people come in – and in this case we talk about the Prince goes out jousting for hours at a time and –

Beverly Meyerson: It could be golf.

Ned Daze: Right.

Jon Meyerson: So they can relate to the current day by using these old English metaphors. So we've had a lot of great feedback. And people buy the book online through Amazon, Barnes & Noble or in bookstores.

Ned Daze: Excellent. Was there anything else we need to know about the book?

Jon Meyerson: Well, it's paperback and you can actually read a few of the chapters online at AfterTheGlassSlipper.com, and get into it and get some of the value out of that.

The other part of course is we have this weekly newsletter and it's called "From Power Struggles to Power Snuggles." And it shows how couples can move in different ways, covering specific issues that come up in their lives. And we've gotten a lot of good – we've had a lot of good comments from people from the United States and abroad.

Ned Daze: I'm glad you brought that up. I wanted to mention that. The website is AfterTheGlassSlipper.com. And we'll of course have a link to that in our show notes. And you can sign up for the weekly newsletter from Jon and Beverly. It's really a terrific resource.

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Beverly Meyerson: Also, if you want to see the – we've done just about a year's worth, maybe posted 52 "Snuggles." And if you want to see them, you can just go to our website and they're all on there, all the past "Snuggles."

Ned Daze: That's terrific. Go in today and really get a lot out of that just right now. Excellent.

Well, Jon and Beverly, thank you so much for joining us today. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with us.

Jon Meyerson: Well, thank you, Ned, for having us.

Beverly Meyerson: Thank you.

Ned Daze: Absolutely. And of course, you can find them online at AfterTheGlassSlipper.com, where you can subscribe to the online newsletter and of course check out old issues as well. You can of course buy the book *After the Glass Slipper* at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, any other online book resellers. We'll have a link to that in the show notes as well.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope you'll join us again next week. We love to hear all of your questions and comments about this or any other episode, so please call our listener comment line at (919) 256-3083. Or e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com.

I'm Ned Daze. Until next time, stay happily married.

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