

Ned: This is Episode Number 152 for Stay Happily Married: Look at Him with Fresh Eyes.

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Ned: I'm Ned Daze and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Do you ever feel that flirtatious, sweet, magical feeling is missing from your marriage, and wish that you could reconnect with your partner in a newfound way?

I'm here with Monica Strobel. She is a compliment coach, a speaker, a writer, and as she likes to say, a mom-preneur. Monica has a vast career in communications and has just published a book called "The Compliment Quotient". Monica is joining us today via Skype from Denver. Monica, welcome to the show. I'm so glad you could join us.

Monica: Thank you so much. So happy to be here.

Ned: I'm really excited about this. I want to talk about several things, and we've got the book to talk about and get some advice from that. You're kind of a pro at juggling a lot of different things; working, doing things out of town, managing the kids at home, doing all that. I want to get a feel for how both of those work.

But first I want to get a little bit of info on the book. Fill me in on where you came from in writing this and who this is geared toward. I take it this is geared more toward the women and the moms who are trying to improve their relationship?

Monica: Yes, it is. The book is "The Compliment Quotient: Boost Your Spirits, Spark Your Relationships, and Uplift the World". It really came from that feeling you get when you've done something well, or you've just done something and somebody recognizes it. The exciting part about appreciation is it makes the person you appreciate feel good, and if you're the one who's giving it, it makes you feel good, too.

That's the premise of the book, that the power of compliments isn't just getting them, because we have a familiarity with that. Most of us have gotten a compliment at least once or twice in our lives, hopefully. But the power that I talk about in the book is how giving more compliments really creates this up-swell and appreciation that ripples out to others and ripples back to you, and brings benefits back to the complimenter as well. It's one little, tiny, simple thing that a woman in her really busy day can try to remember to do.

Ned: Right. I guess it's the giving versus receiving, a 'better to give than receive' kind of thing. I'm wondering how in your life you have managed to handle all of this. You've been working, doing various things in terms of owning companies and things like that, and managing the kids. How do you find time to do things and keep everything under control?

Monica:It definitely is a challenge. I always say it kind of reminds me of that circus act where the guy is running around trying to spin the plates on top of those little sticks. I know a lot of women today feel that way as well. It takes a little bit of effort to put some balance in taking care of others, which I definitely have that outward tendency, like a lot of women. Take care of everybody else, but you have to balance it with time for yourself.

I think maintaining my friendships has enabled me to refill my well, rather than having it go dry, so often during this time. It really helps me keep my focus during my work and with my family, and in my romantic relationship. So that is really important. It's not just a little extra that you should reward yourself with. It's really important.

As a matter of fact, I've heard that's called 'social rest', that time that we spend, especially with our women friends. That's as important as sleep to women. I think that's been very key to me trying to focus on where I am at that moment. You know, leave the work behind when I'm with my kids, leave the kids behind when I'm trying to get my work done. That's been very helpful for me.

Ned:Right. How does this look for people who aren't managing this very well? I'm guessing you wrote this book for people who were having trouble doing this. What do their lives look like when all of a sudden they can't leave work at work and deal with the kids at home?

Monica:Listening is really the key to communication. People, especially your children, immediately know when you're half there, when you're "Uh-huh, uh-huh", and just not really listening. I include that in the book as well. That's why compliments are so powerful, because in order to give a compliment you really have to see something, you have to hear it, you have to pay attention. You have to be there and you have to be an observer.

If you decide that you're going to start giving more compliments to make yourself feel good and boost your relationships, you have to pay attention. You can't half pay attention and find something that your child has done to compliment, because like most people, we tend to focus on the negative; that your kids have left their light on in the closet again, or your husband, once again, left the crumbs on the counter when he loaded the dishwasher.

We do have this sort of default tendency to see the negative. It's so important to edit that out. I call that 'putting on your compliment glasses'. People talk about 'beer goggles,' but when you put your compliment glasses on this is what allows you to look for the positive and say it. It really changes the entire feeling in the relationship at that moment, and that gives you a little rung up - something to stand on to change it again in a future time.

Ned:Okay. I want to get to the compliment system you've got here, which I guess is kind of the whole basis of the book. Is this lack of communication what causes the breakdown of sex appeal and flirtatiousness and romance in people's marriages and relationships?

Monica:That's certainly part of it. What happens pretty traditionally is we get involved

with someone, and the things that at first attracted us to them a lot of times end up being these irritations later on. We also stop putting on our best for the other person, and we also stop looking at them to see what's new.

There's a great quote by an Irish philosopher in his book "Anam Cara". He said that familiarity is actually a veil. So we create the sense that we're totally familiar with our partner, because that makes it safer and more secure. We understand who they are. But the idea is that in that familiarity we're losing all these opportunities to really see them, and learn more about them, because nobody really is completely that familiar to us.

With compliments, you take a step back and you say, "Hmm, how do the people who are working with him see him? How do the other people who are standing at the ball field or across the soccer field see my partner? It allows you to take this fresh look, and this fresh look is what revives that attraction and romance that you felt initially with that person. And that is one of the things that I highly recommend, trying to find ways to build in these opportunities to see again with these original new eyes.

Ned: Do you get the sense that it's generally more the men or the women who are seasoned to the relationship or the marriage?

Monica: It really can be both, and unfortunately it can feed off of each other. I know with women, unfortunately, we do tend to be the kind that are trying to juggle all these balls and take care of all these relationships, and we get all of this stuff in our head. We have these massive 'to do' lists, and at night when we're going to bed, we're thinking about all those things we have to get done tomorrow, as opposed to being in the moment and enjoying our spouse. And I always say that a woman's biggest sex organ is her brain.

So the woman needs to shed some of those pounds of that 'to do' list, and that can help her get in the mood to shed some other things along the way. And the guy needs to remember that in order to connect with his spouse, he needs to connect with her mind, with all the things that are going, and compliments are such a great way.

I know that some men feel like it would be just a little bit too rote to compliment her every day. I don't know a woman who wouldn't respond to, "You look beautiful today," every day. "You look as beautiful as when I met you," "You look beautiful wearing that," you know, "Your eyes are so beautiful to me." There are so many ways that men could use compliments to get more of that brain time with their spouse.

Ned: It could be that we might just be lazy, like, "Oh, compliment her everyday? You're asking a lot."

Monica: That's interesting, because people are always looking for an easy fix. They want a pill. They want something that works. Complimenting might be a little of an extra step, especially until it really becomes more second nature. But it really creates this mind, body, and heart connection in women. And that builds what I call these new pathways between all those. That creates a much stronger passionate

connection, and women need that passionate connection. They need to feel their heart, their mind, and their body all connected to really respond well.

And it's a fun way to build it, as well, because compliments don't all have to be just, you know, sweet and syrupy. They can be sexy. They can be a little sassy, you know, and you can use it to remind each other of what a great lover their partner is, or what a great father they are. There are a lot of ways to find information to compliment on when you decide to let a little bit go.

Ned:Right. What kind of compliments should we be giving? If we're starting from ground zero and we're saying, "Okay, things have kind of cooled off. I want to figure out how to get things back on track, rebuild our interest in one another." Where do we start in terms of compliments? Is there an easy way to get this going until it becomes second nature?

Monica:I think the nice thing is that that's all you need to think about. There's not some big long complicated list, you know, you have to do step one through four, and this kind of thing. The main thing that makes it easy is that you have to just decide you're going to look for and say something positive.

That's the beginning. With a woman complimenting a man, I think one of the areas that we quickly stop commenting on for them is respect. For some reason we tend to think of respect as an outside job. People you don't know, you should get respect from; a boss, your company, or maybe a group that you participate in.

I think that men in particular appreciate being respected for their achievements and accomplishments. Certainly a woman could start there in terms of complimenting on a job well done. We're not in charge of their behavior. I think we tend to decide that we're the one who has to make sure that we don't let those little things slip too long, or they're going to become habits. We really can't be in charge of that. And the way to do this is to really reinforce the positive, and compliment on things that they do well.

So that's one place to start. The other is, I think as soon as we get married, we tend to think that we're done flirting. Flirting is something that you do maybe to get a man, rather than to enjoy as an interaction in your relationship. I think flattery and flirting are a perfect sort of romantic foreplay that you can develop as a couple, and tap into some of that brain space for both people.

Everybody wants to know not just, "You look beautiful," but, "I would still marry you again. You're still attractive to me. You're more beautiful today than when I met you." All of those kinds of things remind each other that they are the one. Flirting and all are great ways to increase the passion in a relationship.

Ned:Right. So psychologically, do compliments do things differently for men than for women? When men receive a compliment, do they get kind of a different benefit out of it than a woman would?

Monica:To tell you the truth, I'm not sure of that exact answer. I do know that men do love compliments as much as women. There has been some research as to whether

or not people respond to negative feedback as well as positive feedback. Young children really can't respond to negative feedback at all. It's kind of complicated. They can't follow why getting negative feedback, like they didn't do something right, how that attaches to what they just did. Whereas once you hit early teens, you can make that connection.

Then they researched just positive comments in general. We all have a place in our brain that lights up when we hear positive comments. Again, going back to my comments about respect, men do tend to like to be commented more on their achievements. Maybe they're not handy with a car, but they took care of it. They took it to the dealer, and they got it fixed themselves. So that's somewhere to start. Men do like to be complimented on achievements and tasks, whereas women, it's a little bit more commenting on how they look. There's that old sticky situation that men talk about, you know, when a woman says, "Does this dress make my butt look big?"

Ned:Right.

Monica:People sort of use that as truth. How does truth come into a relationship? Well, the truth is that she still looks beautiful to him, and that her question is more like, "Man, gravity's taking a toll. Things aren't where they used to be. Do you still think I'm beautiful?" And that's the kind of information that's hidden behind that kind of question.

So by just complimenting on her looks, and how she's dressed up for the day, or just even her hair and different things, that can be a tremendous boon to a woman. We're all connected to feel better when we feel like we're being appreciated in that way. And it helps us connect, essentially, into our bodies and accept ourselves as well.

Ned:Right. Is there a difference between a true compliment versus something more like a come-on or sucking up, or some kind of back-handed compliment? What's the difference?

Monica:Absolutely. And this is where it gets a little bit tricky for people. I've done some surveys. Some people would rather not even compliment at all for fear of it being interpreted as they're sucking up to somebody else or that it's really flattery and not sincere. The main thing, if you're the complimenter, is to always seed your comment in truth. So if it's true to you, then that is really the most important thing.

Sometimes you might compliment and somebody is really going to reject the compliment. You can't necessarily control how they're going to take it. So if it comes from your heart and it's genuine, then you just have to give your compliment, and sometimes you just have to sort of exit stage left, and not worry about how they're taking it.

If there's any chance you might really be brown-nosing or trying to get something, I suggest you run the compliment past this internal motive-meter that you have, especially if it's the boss or someone higher up. Perhaps there's a neighbor who controls something in their Homeowners Association. If you're complimenting that neighbor on their jogging suit that day, and you really don't like their jogging suit, that's probably sucking up to that person.

What happens is eventually you get found out. The feeling isn't there. People understand. There's so much body language that can come through in comments so you do have to be careful. If it's a boss or someone you work with, you have to be a little careful, but you can compliment them in ways such as complimenting about them to someone else in their presence. Again, as long as it starts with that seed of truth, you should be okay.

Ned:Right. Have you run into people, or have people come to you and said, "I'm trying to compliment my husband or wife, and he or she is just really terrible at taking compliments. Everything I say just kind of doesn't work out." Is there any way to get around that?

Monica:That is very common. For some reason, when I talk about compliments and people know about this book, a lot of them say, "Wow, I just cannot accept a compliment." I don't know what that is and where it came from, but I think a lot of people have it mixed up with humility versus gratitude. We're sort of told that, you know, we're not supposed to shine. We're not supposed to stand out. If we accept a compliment, we're being conceited or arrogant. And it's not really true.

A couple of ways that you can go around it if you have trouble accepting praise is to really try to get into the simple habit of just saying, "Thank you," and not adding any other words, because that's where you get into the, "Well, this is just an old outfit," if somebody complimented you on your clothes, or "Does this hairdo look too young?" even if they compliment you on your new style and things like that.

Think about it as a gift. When somebody gives you a gift, you usually don't tell them all kinds of extraneous information. The first thing would be to just suggest that they just say thank you and shorten any of those kinds of responses that come back. The other is that by accepting it graciously you're mirroring back to them, in essence, a compliment, in that we all have things that are gifts or ways that we shine. So you're sort of contributing back to this rising tide that's gonna lift all of our boats, when you accept a compliment nicely.

In terms of helping somebody else, that is definitely a little bit tricky. Again, keep your compliments shorter and very specific. Somebody once said, you know, "Oh, you just have to say those things to me. You're married to me." Well, if you say them very specifically targeted to what somebody did, "That meal that you made was fantastic and delicious," "You're really developing into a fantastic cook," and those types of things, then they can't just generally disregard it.

Ned:Is there anything else we need to know about the book, anything we haven't covered?

Monica:I think, particularly with couples and families, compliments are really a simple but really powerful way to keep the relationships. For a husband and wife, it's a simple way to build that sweet talk and connection that they originally felt in the beginning, that they can let slide with each other the longer that they've been together. And then with children in the mix, children and almost everyone have a natural sense of increase.

By complimenting someone, you're giving them a nice, sturdy rung to stand on on the ladder. If they feel good about what they did, they're going to raise their foot up and go on to the next step, and continue into that vision. So what you're really doing is refocusing and giving them the opportunity to grow into that better part of themselves that they know that they have inside.

Ned:Right. I hadn't even thought about it that way, of helping other people achieve what they want to do. Terrific. Monica, thank you so much for joining us today. It was a pleasure to have you here.

Monica:Thank you so much for having me. I really enjoyed it.

Ned:And of course, thanks to all of you for listening. You can check out Monica's book and learn a lot more about Monica by going to complimentquotient.com. We'll have a link to that in the show notes. You can also purchase her book on Amazon.com, and we'll have a link to that in the show notes, as well.

Thank you for joining us today, and I hope you'll join us again next week. We always love to hear from you to comment on this or any other episode. Call our listener comment line at 919-256-3083, or email us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com. I'm Ned Daze. Until next time, Stay Happily Married.

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