

Ned: This is Episode number 155 for Stay Happily Married, Why Did I Marry You Anyway?

Announcer: 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: I'm Ned Daze, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I'm joined today by Barbara Bartlein. Barbara is a registered nurse. She also holds a Masters degree in physical and mental health. She's a licensed psychotherapist and has been in private practice for over 20 years, specializing in couples and family therapy. Barbara's been married to her husband, Charlie, for 23 years, which I think is always important when we're talking about staying happily married. They both live in Bayview, Wisconsin.

If all that wasn't enough, Barbara is also the author of "Why Did I Marry You Anyway: Overcoming the Myths that Hinder a Happy Marriage." She also has a new book coming out in September of this year called "Marriage Makeover" that hopefully we'll get a chance to talk about. Barbara's worked with hundreds of couples and has helped them rebuild their marriages after they've struggled with various issues, and she's here today to talk to us about what we can do put those into effect in our own marriages. Welcome to the show, Barbara. I'm so glad you could join us.

Barbara: My pleasure. Good morning.

Ned: Good morning, good morning. Well, yeah, I was looking over some of the book before we were doing the interview and there's so much great information in there, and I'm wondering, because there's a lot of personal information you've put in there as well, what kind of prompted you to write this book? Was it inspired more by issues you've seen clients dealing with? People you've helped with their marriages? Or was it inspired more by things you've dealt with in your own life?

Barbara: Well, actually, Ned, a little bit of both. What I've found was in my private practice, I was giving out the same information over and over again, and I really discovered that most of the couples that came to see me were struggling with similar kind of issues. And then I also noticed that they were exactly the kind of issues that when I first got married we were struggling with and how do you work them out. So it really was a dual thing and I decided to take a lot of the information that I'd been using in my practice for years and put it into the book.

Ned: That makes a lot of sense. I guess it's kind of comforting, to some extent, to realize that everybody's having the same issues - that we're not all having specific problems, I guess. What are some of these big factors that you've seen in talking

to people and that you've seen in your own marriage? I realize we could go over a list for hours on problems people have, but are there some big, over-arching issues that you see today that are responsible, I guess not necessarily for breaking up marriages, but are people kind of giving up on marriages? Do you see them giving up on marriages where they could probably make it work?

Barbara: Oh absolutely. Absolutely. I really think that probably about half of the couples that end up getting divorced could make it if they just had a few more tools on how to work some of the problems out. I mean, think about it, where do you learn about how to be married? You don't get a course in school; at least, most of us don't. Most of us don't even have exposure to happy marriages because of the high divorce rate. So where do you learn about it? And I think just by having a few more tools, couples can work things out. And couples can solve the problems that all of us face at some point in a marriage.

Ned: Well, you know, that's interesting because we do have driver's ed and you have to get licensed to drive and you have to study and have to go to school to have any kind of career you want. But there really is no preparation for marriage. I think that for a lot of people, at best, it's sometimes something through a religious institution where you go for a couple weeks to get "counseling" before you get married and then that's it. It's like, "All right, three weeks before you get married. You get some counseling and you're good to go."

Barbara: Exactly. And then, you're cut loose to try and figure out all this stuff by yourself. And it's really a shame because marriage, the person you pick to spend your life with, that's going to be about 85 to 90% of your happiness. And the rest of it is career and money and all those kind of things. But the person that you live with is one of the biggest decisions you're going to make in your whole life. And, you know, unfortunately, like I say, people don't have the tools.

Ned: Right, right. Well, another thing you mention is kind of the myths or kind of misinformation of what marriage is, what love is, that is, to some extent kind of based on pop culture and these kind of romantic notions we have from romantic movies. Like I know, I'm not married, so I clearly think that I'm just going to walk in a coffee shop one day and meet my soul mate and we'll live happily ever after. Are you saying that's a wrong way to look at things?

Barbara: I think it's a dangerous way to look at things. I think the expectation becomes unrealistic. I often say marriage is more about snore strips and flannel nightgowns than all the bells and whistles. There's a day-to-day sort of routine that people get into - and that's good and it's comforting, but the wild infatuation that some people experience when they first meet, that doesn't necessarily last. In fact, I can guarantee you it doesn't last.

A healthy, long-term relationship has ups and downs and, like I say, sometimes it's more about snore strips. And the problem is, see if you have the expectation

that it's always going to be this wild infatuation, the tendency sometimes is to think, "Well, gee, when it's not that way, I married the wrong person. I need somebody else. I need to find that again." And it just isn't realistic. It's not what marriage is about.

Ned: Why are we so eager to believe this? I mean, I think we see some things in movies and we go, "Oh, that's all just for show." but we do kind of carry this sense around that "Oh, my life is going to be like this fairy-tale romance that I've seen on screen." Why are we so willing to jump onto that and latch onto that?

Barbara: I don't know exactly, but I'll tell you, it's almost universal. And I have couple after couple come in and say, "Well, you know, it was so good in the beginning and now things aren't going well. What happened? Maybe I need somebody else." And this is a shame because research shows that people who get divorced, after 5 years tend to be less happy than people who had problems but stuck it out.

So that's kind of another myth. The myth is, "Well, gee, if we get divorced, things are going to be better. I'll be moving on and everything will be great." Not necessarily true. Sometimes, it brings another whole set of problems that can be even more challenging than if they would have stayed and worked it out. So, it's not the answer.

Ned: Right. Well, and I'm kind of wondering, kind of related to this, there's kind of this popular belief, and I know I fall victim to this, who just think, "If I find the right person, I'll be happy forever." And, you know, the focus is just on finding that exact one right person. And is that a bad way to look at things? To be looking for the right person? Should we be kind of looking at ourselves more than the other person?

Barbara: What I like to tell couples is: It's more about being the right person than finding the right person. And by that I mean, you know, working on yourself and looking at yourself and learning about what's important to you because part of finding the so-called right person is finding somebody where the values match your values. You have the same goals in life, you have the same views on things. You'll eliminate a lot of conflict. And, by the way, there really are three areas that couples fight most about. Do you have any idea what the number one issue is that couples fight about?

Ned: I don't know. I'll probably sound silly if I venture a guess. I'm guessing, there's probably money as one of the top three.

Barbara: You're absolutely right. Money is the number one issue. Yet, do you know how many couples actually get married without ever discussing money?

Ned: I'm sure it's a big, big percentage.

Barbara: Yeah, it's huge! They go into not knowing what the other person has, how many assets, what their view is about money, whether the person is a spender, or a saver, or a hoarder. And then they get into the relationship and into the day-to-day and all the issues start to come out. And see money is interesting because a lot of issues get played out with money. Issues about control, issues about who's in charge, who's going to make decisions and it leads to an enormous amount of conflict.

Ned: In my head, I'm trying to come up with the screenplay for the movie involving a couple where they've got snore strips and they're writing out a budget, and I'm just not seeing it pan out so well in the theaters. So I'm kind of understanding the whole deal about the movie romance.

Barbara: You don't think that one will sell?

Ned: I don't know, I'm working on it, I'm working on it. We'll see what we can do. Well, what are the other of the top three? We've got money, money is the big one, number one. What are the other top two?

Barbara: Sex and children, in that order. Sex is number two. A lot of people get married without - I mean certainly they may have sex before they get married or perhaps even live together - but couples tend to argue about sex. And it's interesting, because there seems to be an expectation - here we're back to expectations - there seems to be an expectation that they're both going to agree about everything when in fact, most couples have different sexual appetites. By that I mean, one person may be interested in sex a lot more than the other. And that is normal. And couples need to hear that that's normal. And how can you work that out? So sex is number two.

Children is number three. And again, we were talking about how people get married without talking about money. I've had couples come in that got married without talking about whether they want children. And all of a sudden, they find out one wants them and the other one doesn't. Not a good situation. Or they both want them, they have the kids and then they find out that they don't agree at all on how to raise them. They argue about discipline, they argue about how to handle things with the children. Causes of a lot of stress.

I don't mean to be discouraging to the audience, but couples without children actually tend to be happier than couples that have them, at least in the short term. In the long-term, of course, having a family can bring a lot of joy, but when children are little, there's a lot of tension in the household.

Ned: Right, right. And I'm wondering, it does seem crazy and it seems these are things that people would discuss, but I guess you're right. When things are going well, and it's in the beginning and you like somebody, you just kind of assume that he or she is going to have the same views as you do on things. "Well, of course we're

going to manage money the same. Of course, they have the same views on children as I do." But I guess we kind of just get wrapped up in that notion and don't actually ask the questions which we should.

Barbara: Asking the questions and exploring how everybody feels about things. And the other tendency, and this is one I see quite a bit, especially in the beginning, we may get glimpses that the other person doesn't agree on this or feels differently about that, but we kind of push it aside and we say to ourselves, "Well, that'll get better when we get married." Well, guess what? It doesn't. In fact, usually, it gets worse. So it's really important that couples sit down and do some talking, and I often recommend for couples that consider going to, like, a marriage encounter or a couples encounter or consider going for some pre-marital counseling. It works really well and it will help give you a process to get through the issues.

Ned: Okay. I'm also wondering, you make this statement in there that a lot of people think that marriage is based on love and that it's not, and you had mentioned a little bit about love versus infatuation earlier. What is a marriage based on if it's not based on love? Why is it wrong to assume that love is what a successful marriage would be based on?

Barbara: Well, again, we're back a little bit to what we're programmed in the popular culture. I mean, what did the song say? "All You Need is Love". Well, good luck. You need a lot more than that. The reason I say marriage isn't based on love is because, in my experience, a lot of people who end up getting divorced still love each other. That isn't the problem. The love is there.

True marriage, and a long-term marriage, is based on trust and commitment. And if you work on building the trust and commitment, the love will grow. Now, again, a lot of folks have that backwards. They think, "Well, if we love each other enough, then trust and commitment will be there." You have to work on trust and commitment. And let me give you some examples.

For example, when I talk about trust, I'm not talking about whether the person is out cheating and that kind of thing. I'm talking about little everyday things. Can you share secrets with your partner without them being broadcast to everyone? When your partner says they're going to do something, do they follow through? If they're going to be late, do they call? It's little things that build the trust and understanding. And as that trust grows, the commitment grows.

There are times in a marriage, because every marriage has ups and downs, there are times in a marriage that it's the commitment that holds you together, not much else. There are days when you don't particularly love them. In fact, you don't even like them. And it's the commitment that holds you together. And then, over a period of time, things come back and it cycles around, and things are great again. But, especially during the hard times, it's the commitment that holds you together.

Ned: Well, I'm wondering, in these hard times, when people are having trouble, are they kind of willing to come see somebody who can talk to them about what's going on? Like when people would come to visit you, I'm guessing it was because they were having problems. Was there anything they were trying that wasn't working? Or did they both realize that they needed help?

Barbara: Very often, one's been sort of dragging the other person to go get some help. And, in my experience, too often, unfortunately, couples wait too long to go get some help so that they end up with a lot of water under the bridge, a lot of bad feelings, a lot of conflict that's been unresolved for years.

Actually, the time to get some additional tools is before you have a lot of problems so you can learn, for example, how to argue. Arguing, by the way, is good. A lot of people think it isn't good, but it's good. You just have to learn how to argue fairly. You have to learn how to argue constructively as opposed to destructively. One of the number one indicators for couples that are going to get divorced are couples that don't argue. So you don't want to avoid the arguments, you don't want to avoid the issues, but you need to learn how to deal with them in a healthy manner.

Ned: When people come in to see you and they have problems going on, what are some of the kind of basic tips you give them to start out with when they're dealing with these issues?

Barbara: The first thing I usually have couples do is come up with a list of rules for their relationship. What kind of rules, and people say, "Rules? You shouldn't have to have rules." Of course, you have rules. Whether they're written, unwritten, spoken or unspoken, there are rules and you might as well talk about them and figure out what they are.

So for example, I'll give you some of the rules that people frequently choose and some of the ones I've chosen: We have a rule that there's no yelling. Yelling is not constructive. Nobody listens, and if one person starts to yell, the other person yells louder. So in the beginning of my marriage, boy, we were both yellers. We had to work at that one really hard. And what we did is anytime somebody yelled, we had to put money in a jar. Well, boy, that jar filled right up. I mean, that didn't take long at all. So we took the money and we went out to dinner.

And we noticed the next time, it filled up a lot slower and pretty soon we got to the point where we just don't yell at each other. And it's great. We have a rule no swearing. No slamming doors. We have a rule that if you're going to be late, more than 15 to 20 minutes, please call. So we have a list of rules.

We have rules about money. When we first got married, we had a rule that if you spent anything over \$20, touch base with the other person. Well now, \$20 doesn't buy anything so we upped the amount to \$200. But, we have a rule about that.

One of us wouldn't just go buy a car without talking to the other person or buy something expensive without talking to the other person. So I encourage people to come up with their list of rules. How do they want this relationship to work? And included in that rule list is things about respect and how you're going to treat the other person. And you can put anything in.

I have a rule that Charlie needs to plan the anniversary and he still sometimes jokes, he goes, "I don't know how I agreed to that rule. Why can't you do it?" I said, "Well, that's your job." So, you can make it fun. It doesn't need to be torturous to do these things. So I encourage people to come up with a list of rules. I also encourage people to spend some time looking at how they argue. How do they operate? Are they an exploder? Are they a silent-treatment kind of person? How do they handle those things? And then I like to give couples tools on how they can handle them better.

Ned: We talked about going to see a therapist or a counselor to get help with the marriage. Do you see people going to counselors or therapists who aren't necessarily trained in marriage or couples therapy and maybe see divorce as an option? And then, a couple goes in to fix the marriage and then the counselor ends up telling them, "Well, I just think that you guys might be better off apart." Is that ever something that happens?

Barbara: Yeah, yeah. Unfortunately, it does. I call it therapist-assisted marriage suicide. There was a real shift in the marriage counseling field in the 1970s and 1980s, where people started to look at divorce as a very positive option. This is when divorce became more no-fault. So it wasn't uncommon, for example, for somebody to go into marriage counsel and have a marriage counselor say, "Well, I just don't think you guys can make it." and so on.

One of the things I caution, and I do training with professionals about this, is you really have to examine whether your position should be marriage-neutral. Based on the benefits that marriage gives people and the research on what happens to families and children: I don't think a therapist can be marriage-neutral. I tell couples right off: I'm pro-marriage. I'm interested in saving marriages. That's what I try to do. I don't encourage people to get divorced because I know the statistics.

People don't end up happier, the kids have more problems. Usually financially, both people are much worse off when they get divorced, especially the woman. The woman's income tends to drop anywhere from 30 to 50%. So I don't view it, necessarily, as a positive option. And I caution people, when you pick out a therapist, pick out somebody who believes in marriage. Sometimes, the person that they're seeing has been divorced themselves two or three times. Well, I'm not saying that that doesn't come with its own values and information, but I think it's really helpful to be with somebody that knows how to make a marriage work.

Ned: Right, right. And one more thing I want to mention, you mention in the book the importance of finding and being with other married couples who are happy and whose marriages are going well and I was wondering if you could just talk a little bit about that and why that's so important?

Barbara: Well, you know, I came up with that idea kind of early in my own marriage. Charlie and I were out to dinner one night with this couple, and the whole night the woman was complaining about him and kind of putting him down. We sat there listening to it and after a while, I started thinking, "Well, gee, you know what? Charlie does that stuff too. I'm feeling kind of mad at him." And by the time we got home, I'm like, "Gee, Charlie, you're just as bad as this guy." And I thought to myself, "Well, wait a minute, when we went out, we were getting along fine, by the time we get home, I'm mad at the guy."

If you want to be happily married, hang around with other happily married people. Not only will it eliminate situations like that, but oftentimes you can pick up tools and ideas and things that can work in your own marriage. We have a whole group of friends that have been married for a long, long term. And we go skiing together, we do things together and it's been a lot of fun. All these stable, intact families. And it's been great for the kids. They all know each other, they've grown up together. So yeah, if you want to be happily married, hang around with other happily married people.

Ned: Well, makes sense, makes sense. Well, I'm wondering, would you be able to tell us just a little bit about your upcoming book? It's coming out in September, is that right?

Barbara: Correct, "Marriage Makeover" will be released by Turner Publishing. "Marriage Makeover" is really 75 easy things you can do to improve your marriage, sometimes without your spouse even knowing. So either person can pick up this book and try a few of the things or pick it up and leave it laying out. But it's just tips on how to improve your marriage and it ranges from typical ones to not so typical ones. I even have in there "Learn how to pole dance". "Dance in your living room". I've got in there a recipe to make Coq au Vin, one of my favorite dinners. Works every time. If there's an argument, make Coq au Vin. I just have some ideas and tips that anybody can use to improve their relationship.

Ned: Terrific. Well, we're looking forward to that for sure. And, Barbara, thank you so much for joining us today, I feel like we really learned a lot, and I hope you'll join us again sometime when the new book is out. That'd be great.

Barbara: Would love to. Absolutely my pleasure.

Ned: Terrific. Well, you can learn a lot more about Barbara on her website, ThePeoplePro.com. There's also a website for the book, "Why Did I Marry You Anyway?", WhyDidIMarryYouAnyway.com and that is available for purchase on

Amazon.com. You can also get the Kindle version so if you're a crazy person like me, you can read it on your phone or Kindle or mobile device. Well, of course, I have a link to that in the show notes.

Thank you so much for joining us today, and I hope you'll join us again next week. We'd love to hear your comments about this or any other episode so please 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.

Announcer: 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 email us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com or call us at 919-256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.