

Stephanie: This is Episode number 164 for Stay Happily Married, To Divorce or Not.

Announcer: Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a healthy and happy 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.

Stephanie: I'm Stephanie Lockwood, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Should you stay married or not? Are the issues in your relationship big enough to warrant a divorce? My guest today to discuss these topics and more is Dr. Robin Siebold.

No matter how perfect a relationship may seem to the outside observer, there are always issues within a relationship that puts stress on each of the partners and although we may love our spouse, we can always find ourselves questioning the relationship all the same. It could be that annoying habit of one spouse, or even a lack of communication and respect.

There are several problems that could leave us wondering if the relationship is really worth all of the effort, and unless the problem is acknowledged and resolved this could spouse a split or even a divorce for some. For more than 20 years, Dr. Robin Siebold has been working with individuals and organizations imparting the skills, insights and strategies that make life more manageable and meaningful.

She specializes in divorce and relationship issues and communication skills as well as codependency. Robin is a licensed mental health counselor and maintains a private practice in Florida. Robin recently published a book called "To Divorce or Not: Reflections of the Self", which is actually now available on amazon.com, and we will post a link to that in our show notes.

Although Robin has been divorced, she is now happily married and enjoys ballroom dancing with her husband and spending time with her three grown sons. Welcome to the show, Robin. I'm so glad you could join us.

Robin: Well thank you, Stephanie. I've been looking forward to this. There is nothing I like better than to talk on the air to people that might not otherwise come into a therapist's office to get information that might be helpful to them.

Stephanie: Exactly. And I think that has to do with the stigma of counseling and sitting down and just letting and airing all of your problems to someone who is to begin with a stranger, it's something that's very difficult, so it's always great for people to have resources like you here where they can just search and specifically find the answers to their problems or things that may relate to them.

People that actually do come into your office, that have the courage to open up to you and let you into their world, you have couples coming in looking for advice and counseling. What are some of the most common complaints you hear from couples today?

Robin: Well, generally what I hear the most is the men come in and say she talks too much, and the women come in and say he doesn't talk enough. We definitely have different communication styles as far as the difference between the sexes. There is a battle of the sexes for sure going on.

Stephanie: That's perfect for my next question. We have obviously a difference in communication. Now, why do you think it is that men don't want to communicate and women seem to over communicate?

Robin: Well, I don't think it's that they don't want to or women do want to I just think that's the way our brains are wired. Men are very linear. If men hear that there's a problem, so their wife comes home from work and she's got an issue with somebody at work or she has a difficult project that she's working on, the first thing that the man wants to do is to give her a solution.

You ought to do this and women generally, what I tell men is, they want to talk in circular motion, so they just want to talk about it. They want you to listen. They want you to acknowledge what they're experiencing. They don't necessarily want you to fix it. Men hear a problem, they offer a solution. Women just want to talk, which is why women need to have girlfriends to do that with because men aren't always going to be the ones that are going to be able to sit and listen to that.

Stephanie: Oh wow, you are just preaching to the choir on this one. I find that that is the case most of the time, and I think it even brings up more issues with this that we're talking too much because I think women tend to fight that solution they've just been given and they want to continue to talk about their problems and rant and rave and men just seem to stop listening at that point. They figure they've done what they're supposed to.

Robin: Literally. They do. They tune the women out and then the women are saying you don't listen to me and then they assume or translate that to you don't love me.

Stephanie: Exactly. Do you have a lot of issues with couples coming in, and I know that this has been a problem, but the women who are obviously wanting to talk about their lives, this is how women communicate, they're going and asking their husbands or their boyfriends, how was your day and trying to get more details about the little snippets of information they're getting about the day, and then you come to the end of the conversation and you're kind of waiting for your turn and that never seems to come. Is that a big problem?

Robin: Well that and I hear men say, listen next time I'll take a tape recorder or video camera with me and I'll record the whole thing and you can just watch that. That's where we're missing the point. It's a way of connecting. There's got to be this tension between couples, and what happens is a lot of people get caught up and stuck in the power struggle, which is inevitable in any relationship.

I don't care whether it's a marriage or whatever relationship there's always going to be a time when you don't see eye-to-eye, and what we tend to do is try to get other people to be like us and we're all different and we have to accept and acknowledge and honor the differences that we all have rather than try to make each other be the same. I mean, that would be kind of boring to be in a relationship or marriage with ourselves, don't you think?

Stephanie: You need something to diversify it, and I guess that's why they say opposites attract, but being opposites can be good, but it also can be very bad. What do you think are some of the first warning signs that aren't compatible, they may be too opposite and they're heading down that road towards a breakup?

Robin: There is truth that opposites attract. There has to be differences in order to make the relationship interesting, but there also has to be things that we see eye-to-eye about. For instance, one person may be an introvert where the other one is an extrovert, and then that becomes a bone of contention or one is a saver and one is a spender.

The things we have to have that are similar are we have to look at life similarly. How we want to live our lives. How we want to vacation or where we might want to vacation. If we're going to have children or not have children. Who is going to do the vacuuming, and who is going to bring home the bacon? Things like that we have to have agreements on and we have to have similar foundational big issues.

Like family, how important is family? Some people don't think family is that important, and they are disconnected from their family and one of the things is that we often do pair up that way. We have one who comes from a family that's very involved, maybe over-involved in their life, and the other one is from a disengaged family where they're under-involved.

We have to accept the fact that we're coming together differently, but we have to come together and come up with a common denominator of issues that we do agree to.

Stephanie: For couples, when they're trying to find out, maybe even in the beginning stages when they're dating and seeing if this is someone they're compatible with, do you find that issues of religion or even political views play a big role in how they're going to live their life?

Robin: I don't think so much anymore. I think that used to be. I don't think they have the line drawn in the sand like we used to about religion and political views, and we've certainly seen a lot of celebrity couples that are very opposite there. Again, it's about accepting the differences and the diversity of the other person, which makes a relationship richer, because for us to say, oh no, I've got to live in this little box and the children that we have to live in this little box with me is not allowing them to evolve and incorporate the differences or the other attributes that the other partner brings to the table.

That's why you picked them in the first place. Very often, going back to the power struggle again, people will get into, well I thought you were going to be this way or I thought you were going to be that way, and that's another difference between men and women. There's a little joke that we have in therapy circles that men get married thinking that women are not going to change and they do, and women get married thinking the men are going to change and they don't.

Stephanie: And that's the number one thing, I'm sorry, before you get into a relationship you'll always hear that from your friends and family who are married or have been divorced is that you can't change someone. That's the thing I think I hear the most.

Robin: Well, I think the best that someone is going to be is before you marry them, not after because I think a lot of women in particular are guilty of pairing up with a project. Women love to take on a project.

Stephanie: Yes, they do.

Robin: Men don't want to be changed, and we don't have the right to determine that they should change even if we think that they'd be better for it.

Stephanie: Exactly. Just because you think they'll be better for it, doesn't necessarily mean they'll appreciate that same value system there.

Robin: And most likely they aren't because what you're saying when you tell somebody they have to change is you're saying there's something wrong with you and it's like I say to people just because we have a difference of opinion, that doesn't mean that you're right and they're wrong because every time that you have to be right you're making someone else wrong. So if you're telling somebody constantly that they're always wrong, why would they want to be around you or open up or spend time or engage with you?

Stephanie: Exactly. When you're constantly critiquing them. That's perfect and I think that is an issue and you have a lot of men who just become kind of submissive to these women who are kind of piling things onto them hoping they'll change and that I think leads to resentment much later on.

Robin: Very much so. And then, they come into my office and they're clueless like I was doing this and I was doing that or a lot of times it's too late when they do get to a therapist's office, which is really sad. Even though my book is called. "To Divorce or Not", the subtitle Reflections of the Self, it's really written as a pro-relationship book.

I have married friends that read it and say it's helped their relationship because it gets us back on track to look at why did we come together in the first place and what our responsibility is to the relationship and why did we get married in the first place? That's really when we get out of the gate, I ask groups that I talk to all the time, why did you marry the person that you married, and my favorite, of course, is always that because we were in love or I wanted to have a companion that I grow old with, but there's a better answer than why we pair up with the people that we pair up with.

Stephanie: What would you say those answers would be if not for just love?

Robin: Well, I think love is a great start, but we really pair up with people to heal ourselves. The wounds that we have from our childhood, the wounds that we walk around with that we feel that we're incomplete and what we tend to do is we pair up with people and think they're going to complete us and they're going to fix all this stuff for us and if we realize that they come to the table with their wounds and we come with ours and we're there to help them heal from the past.

It comes from Harville Hendrix's work, "The Imago, Getting the Love You Want." The imago, which is an image on the brain, we do marry our mothers and our fathers. I keep marrying my mother and that doesn't mean that that's a mistake, it means that I keep learning more about my relationship and my wounds with my mother that I cannot heal with her, but I can heal with a partner that I've paired up with, and that's what everybody is doing whether they realize it or not.

Stephanie: Now that is very interesting because I have heard that you always marry your mother or you marry your father, but I thought it was just something that you're used to, I never thought of it as a way to play out something that was unfinished.

Robin: You're right. It is because you're used to it. It's familiar to you. The person you feel this chemistry with - I love it when people say that - I've done matchmaking and I've done speed dating events and since I was a little kid my parents said I was always matching people up. I love it when people say I don't feel the chemistry and I said that chemistry that you're feeling is your pathology. You realize that this is a person that you're really going to have to work with because it's what's familiar and that comes from the word family.

Stephanie: So assuming you don't feel chemistry on the first meeting or the second meeting, that doesn't necessarily mean it's a bad thing it just means that it's not familiar to you so it's not striking a cord right away?

Robin: Exactly. Because the fact is that when people first go their separate ways, the assignment that I like to give them is I want you to go out and interview people that you're not drawn to, not attracted to because you're going to learn something about yourself. What is it about this person that you don't feel the connection with? What you're looking for is someone that can bring up the wounds in you and that's what the chemistry is.

You're going to learn about the things that maybe you don't think you deserve in a relationship. Maybe, this person is just too good or too nice and you still think you need to be kicked around a little bit more.

Stephanie: Interesting. I never knew it broke down into something like that. I just assumed that if you don't fall in love instantly and there's no chemistry then it wasn't meant to be, but there's just something behind that, a little more science to it and psychology.

Robin: Absolutely. My favorite definition for love comes out of Scott Peck's book, "The Road Less Traveled" where love is a decision, it's not a feeling. It's something that you decide that you want to give to the other person, but you're willing to give it to yourself, too, and you want what's best for this other person as much as you want it for yourself and that's what real love is.

Stephanie: That you want what's best for this other person as well as yourself. I think that's very profound because I think we tend to forget that a lot when we're in a relationship, when we're dating, sometimes we give so much to the other person and then we just give up when it doesn't turn out exactly how we want and we become more selfish, I think.

Robin: And another thing that happens in relationships, too is enter in children, so then what happens is we focus on the children and we raise the children and so for 18 years we raise children and then we look at each other and we haven't nurtured the relationship, so if we're not going to put the time in with our relationship, then how do we expect that it's going to flourish?

I tell people to take your time and use it like your money. If you don't put the investment of time into the part of your life that you want the biggest return from, just like you wouldn't put your money where you're going to get the least return, you wouldn't put the bulk of your estate into a place where you're going to get the least return because you would expect to not get anything out of that, but that's what most people are doing with their relationships.

When I take a circle and I divide it up 100% of time into the different compartments that they have with their work life, their marriage, their relationship, their children, their friends, their alone time and generally what I

find is the place that they're looking for the biggest return, their relationship is the place that they're putting the least amount of time into.

Stephanie: So it breaks down obviously. What happens when you have these couples and I know it happens quite often around the time when the kids are raised, they're 18, they're out of the house, maybe at university and you have this empty nest syndrome and a lot of times it happens even before kids are in the picture, what do you do, after presiding over couples for years and years. But what do you do when someone is at the end of that road and they've kind of decided in their mind they're ready for divorce, what's the most common complaint you hear from couples who are ready to split? What becomes their deciding factor?

Robin: Well, they're usually running around on empty. One of the things that I get people to look at is there are many different ways to love. Just because your partner is not loving you the way you're loving them doesn't mean that they're not loving you. That brings me to another book, one that I ask people to read who are in a relationship immediately, which is "The Five Love Languages" by Gary Chapman.

He broke it down very simply. Men generally don't like to read psychobabble and self-help books so this is one that is very easy to use. They can go online and take a self-score test, but basically we usually show people how we love and then we expect to be loved back that way and what we're doing is not speaking the same language. One of the biggest issues that comes in with couples that are in trouble is that they're fighting over garbage and sex.

Stephanie: Garbage and sex.

Robin: And so they look at me and say okay, but women generally get upset because yeah you brought home the paycheck or you came home in time for dinner, but you didn't take the garbage out this morning before you left and he comes in and he kisses her on the back of her neck or pats her on the butt and she's making his favorite meal and she tells him to get away from her.

That's because most women are active service lovers, and most men are physical touch people, so we're speaking our love in the language that we want to receive it in and we end up in conflict because we don't understand that maybe keeping the house clean and making his favorite meal and ironing his shirts and doing all those things for him, but he's not taking the garbage out, so it doesn't matter that he comes in and he's wanting to touch me and he's kissing on me and so on and so forth, you follow?

Stephanie: Right.

Robin: So there are five love languages and we need to find out what ours is first of all, and then we need to inform our partner because again, we need to make deposits

regularly of loving our partner in their language, not our language. Most couples that come in have an empty tank and I tell them it's just like making money deposits, if you don't put enough money in the bank when you put your ATM card in you're not going to get money spitting back out of the teller.

You need to make regular deposits in your partner's love tank in their love language, and then what happens is they start to respond to you because when they're bone dry, just like a car that runs out of gas, it's going to be beside the road and it's going to be abandoned. The first thing I ask them to do is to give me 90 days because it always takes 90 days to change any bad habit and that's what basically has happened. People have gotten into the bad habit of not listening to each other, not talking to each other and not investing in each other's well-being.

Stephanie: So do you think that by communicating different things like their needs or what they take as appreciation or even things that they're irritated with is good, being this honest?

Robin: Absolutely. Because the number one killer of a relationship is the fact that not just the people don't communicate properly, but they don't know how to resolve conflict.

Stephanie: Interesting. Knowing everything that you know from all your years' experience, what advice would you give to couples who are at that point where they've run out of gas, they feel like there's nothing they can do, what could you say to them to help bring them back from that edge of breaking up?

Robin: Well, the first thing is I send them online to take that test and find out what their love language is, and then they start investing every day whether their partner's investing in their love language or not. I tell them to be more conscious of how they talk to their partner when they're upset.

It's not that they don't talk about issues because I have couples that come in and they're literally fighting all the time and then we have couples who say we never fight, we don't understand why we're at this place. Well, there has to be friction in order for there to be passion. There has to be conflict for there to be love.

Conflict and romance are opposite sides of the coin. We need to be able to acknowledge the fact that I'm not 100% happy with everything you do and say, but I also need to choose my battles. My goal is to stay married with you and to feel love for you most of the time, but it's not going to be all the time, and I have to have expectations that that's the way relationships work.

I need to be willing to let you know when it's a big thing, like you violated one of my non-negotiables as I call it, that you've done something that upsets me to the point where the hair goes up on the back of my neck. That's a big issue with me and tells me that I've got history behind it, so I need you to process that with me.

It's maybe not about you so much as it's about me, but can you help me with that because that goes back to why did we pair up in the first place?

We paired up so that we can help each other heal. You just brought something up that I wasn't getting as a child from my parents, and I need to know if you can walk through this with me because it's more about me than it is about you, but I need you to listen to me so I tell you how I feel about this, and then how you respond to your partner when they're upset is telltale because don't personalize it.

I tell people all the time what you think of me is none of my business, it's really all about my history. It's the same thing in my office. If a client comes in and they really like me that's because it has something to do with their past that I bring up some memory of that they don't even know about and if they really don't like me it's the same thing.

Stephanie: You said working with your spouse is one of the most important things, you pick your battles. Do you find a trend for couples who are younger, who maybe grew up in this age where everything is catered towards us. We have TV, we have Internet, we have dating sites that are using algorithms based on the information you're putting in to find someone that they believe according to this algorithm is best paired for you.

When we create these partners or this lifestyle where we get to select almost every option, are there any issues when we get into relationships where we're so quick to give up because one thing doesn't fall into line the way we expected it to or the way we want it to?

Robin: Well, I think there are big issues in these time because I've got two grown sons of my own that I raised conservative, you get married and then you have children. Instead they haven't gotten married and they have children, but they're in long-term relationships and I think that the kids today, and it's not just kids, I think society today, it's all about instant gratification and if you're not making me feel the way I want to feel I'm going to trade you in.

What I tell couples all the time is nobody escapes and whatever it is that's not working in this relationship, within 4 to 6 months will crop up in the next relationship, and you'll be able to pick up where you left off in the last one because you do not escape whatever your issues are. They are going to show up in any relationship that you have. So yes, I think people are jumping too quickly.

The divorce rates have stayed pretty consistent, around 50% and you should see the look on people's faces when I say every time you divorce your rate of success goes down 10%, so if you're on your second marriage you're going to probably divorce at a 60% rate, 70% for the third time and I don't even go past that.

Stephanie: I guess that explains Larry King's marriage patterns. He's on nine now. I guess that explains it.

Robin: I don't know. I can't keep up with him. It's hard enough to keep up with the other stuff. We have to have realistic expectations of each other and that's what I think happens is that people really have to take a hard look at themselves, which is again why the subtitle is Reflections of the Self. When we're looking for other people to fix things and we've had a whole society like that don't we? We're looking for somebody else to always fix every problem that we have and we get mad when they don't do it.

Stephanie: It sounds like we're putting a lot of our own fault and our own insecurities on other people in hopes that they'll be the ones to cure us.

Robin: That's right.

Stephanie: I think just from personal experience, from seeing friends, from seeing people even at my work, it seems that a lot of people today, too no matter their age, because we're in this whole instant gratification, we want it now, we lack a lot of patience, and that seems to be a huge issue because someone does something wrong once or someone has some kind of fault, instead of being patient and saying look I'm here to work with you on this.

I don't like it or it's not something I approve of, can we talk about a way to better do it, people just see it and they recognize it's a behavior and action that they don't like and they so quickly give up, What would you say to couples, maybe who lacked patience to kind of give them inspiration to try and be patient and try and work on things?

Robin: Well, patience, my grandmother told me that when I was a little girl that was something I needed to learn and I'm still learning that because when we set a high bar for ourselves, we expect other people to live up to that, so when we're hardest on ourselves we also spill that over into our relationships and expect other people to want the same things we want at the same speed that we want in the same way that we want.

I tell couples let's make a deal, on the show Let's Make a Deal there's three doors. Behind door number one is you stay in your relationship, and you find a way to be happy. Behind door number two you stay in a relationship and you just keep telling yourself how miserable you are. The third door is you leave. They sit there and they say yeah, but if he would just do this, if she would just do that and I go that's door number four, that's the illusion. You've got to get into reality. The illusion does not exist.

There is no door number four where you get to tell them how they should change. You can make requests. They need to be realistic. You need to know who you

paired up with and had babies with before you do those things because you can't change it once you've gone down that road. The only thing you can do is make requests. You cannot expect that now they're going to be a different person because in your mind you thought because they loved you so much when you get married that that's what they were going to do.

One thing that I say to them also is what would love do? If you can remember back to when you were madly in love with this person, you can reclaim that back again if you can focus on what you would've done then when you felt in a state of love instead of you keep telling yourself how miserable you are.

The more you keep telling all your friends and family and anybody else who will listen how miserable you are or how this person stopped meeting your needs, the more you're going to be heading down the path of divorce instead of focusing on what's right about this person and giving thanks about the things that you like about this person and focusing on that.

Even writing them down and reminding yourself, then that's what you're investing in. If we invest in our misery, we're going to get more misery. If we invest in our happiness, we're going to get more happiness.

Stephanie: Is there ever a situation, obviously when people are coming to you, they're looking to work things out, but is there ever a situation where you would say look it really isn't working, I think the best option for you is for you both to split and kind of go your separate ways?

Robin: Well, I don't think it's anybody else's business to tell anyone whether they should or shouldn't leave, but certainly if there's violence involved and children are at risk or you're at risk because there's abuse or there's alcohol or other drugs involved, those are times when you really need to take a hard look at why you would stay in that situation, but I as a therapist, I think I can go on record as saying that I have never, ever told anyone to stay or to go because I don't think anybody else can get inside our skin and know what the wounds are and the healing that could occur in this relationship if we could just get that to work, but when there's violence then that's a non-negotiable.

Robin: Yes, definitely. Well Robin, thank you so much for talking with us today. It really was a pleasure to have you on the show. I feel like I have already learned so much that I can apply and I'm going to be going online and taking this test and checking out the book. Robin's book, "To Divorce or Not: Reflections of the Self" is currently available on amazon.com, and we will post a link to that in our show notes. To find out more about Robin, you can always check out her website at www.robinsiebold.com.

Thank you so much for joining us today, and I hope you'll join us again next week. We always love hearing from you. To comment on this or any other

episode, just call our listener comment line at 919-256-3083 or you can email us your comments at comments@stayhappilymarried.com. I'm Stephanie Lockwood and 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.