

Anna: Third time's the charm. The truth about multiple marriages. This is "Stay Happily Married" Episode Number 247.

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

Anna: I'm Anna Riley and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. What's the real story behind multiple marriages? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the current marriage rate is 6.8 per 1,000 people. Not so shockingly, the current divorce rate is 3.4. This means that right now 50% of marriages are ending in divorce. With half of all marriages ending in divorce, more and more people are finding themselves remarried and categorized as multiple marriers. I'm talking two, three, four and even five marriages. Maybe more. What are the facts behind these kinds of situations? How does the multiple marriage pattern get established in the first place?

Oftentimes, serial marriers are perceived by society in a relatively negative or less respectable manner. But why? What has really become most interesting is the expectations that surround marriage. Today we're talking with a multiple marrier herself, Pam Evans. While Pam serves as a senior director in the high tech sector of a Fortune 1,000 company, she also doubles as an author and public speaker on the subject of multiple marriages. She has not only been featured on the Bay Area Independent Publisher's List but also on last summer's top 12 book pick list on "Spirited Woman." She's here to discuss the myths and truths of being a serial marrier.

Welcome to the show, Pam. I'm so glad you could join me today.

Pam: Thank you for having me, Anna.

Anna: Absolutely. What is it that inspired you to write a book on such a personal topic?

Pam: First, I've been divorced from my last and fourth spouse for about 13 years now, and I would say about five years ago I met a co-worker and she divulged to me that she was married for the fifth time. I was both shocked and amazed that this beautiful hyper educated mother of two professional woman was actually in the same life boat as I was. I had finally found a friend that had been married even more times than I had been. We developed this really professional and personal relationship and over drinks one evening I felt comfortable enough to come out of the closet and admit to her that I'd been married multiple times myself. We actually had a good laugh about it. She said, "You know, Pam, you should write a book and entitle it 'Ring Exchange.'"

So this person, this one woman, was actually the initial catalyst for my writing the book. I actually refer to her in the very first chapter of it. The second thing happened then after this, after I began to find out that there were other people who were in the same stage of life that I was in. I decided to sit down one day and ask myself the question, "How did a nice person like me with great family and friends, a solid education, and a fantastic career end up carrying around this big fat multiple marrier scarlet letter?" How was that people who had probably had more intimate relationships than I had ever had, they just hadn't married their mates. They didn't carry a permanent mark or tattoo on their reputation but I did.

I started to figure out, I went through a process of self-discovery and self-examination, and I started to figure out what went wrong. What had led me to have this turnstile marriage life that had happened completely by accident? When I did this self-discovery, and I did a little bit of research to go along with it, I got super excited about sharing the wisdom and lessons I had learned so others wouldn't fall into the same pattern. If they already had, if they wanted to break the multiple marriage syndrome that they could do so.

Anna: That's great. How does one set on the path of becoming a serial marrier? Are there certain personality traits and behavioral patterns that multiple marriers tend to have?

Pam: Yeah, let's go into that. First and foremost, the multiple marrier men and women I studied had one thing in common for sure. All of us had had our very first romantic relationship by junior high school, believe it or not. Furthermore, all of us had gotten married for the first time between the ages of 17 and 19. So we had set out on this marriage track at very young ages. It was interesting to find that the individuals that were interviewed were between the ages of 50 and 70 years old. So they were, and I was young during a time when very few people lived together before marriage and the average age of people entering into matrimony was in their early 20s.

So you have to ask yourself how many teens or young adults back then, or even today have the life experience and the relationship skills or the education or the career development or even the self-confidence to really embark upon a successful marriage journey. I think some of these people who got married very young have been very successful but many have not been. I think the odds are really against us when we set our life up this way.

Another reason many of us chose to get married at a young age was, and I don't think this is too surprising, was that we were both running from something and to something that we thought would be better. In my case, I was raised in a rather large family with loving, but strict parents who had lots of rules and regulations. I just wanted to develop my own freedom and independence. I believed by marrying my high school sweetheart and running off into the sunset with him that I could get that freedom and he would be a safety net for me and it would be easy for us to live happily ever after. I had no concept of what it would take to grow and nurture a healthy marriage, and neither did he. We simply just fell into marriage and within about six years it had disintegrated.

Some other things I found that we had in common, we multiple marriers were very impulsive decision makers. That came out loud and clear. When one marriage didn't work out, we were onto finding the next partner in a matter of days, weeks, months, sometimes a year or two if we were lucky. I had one multiple marrier who said it was once hours from the time he got his divorce decree to the time he got remarried. I said, "This must have happened in Vegas." He said, "Actually, it did and I married a dancer and the marriage lasted about two weeks until I realized what I'd done." Seriously, that's not the norm. Most multiple marriers are really trying to do the right thing, or trying to put a little thought into it. Most of the time, most of us had someone lined up while we were waiting to get divorced or shortly thereafter believing we had simply made the wrong partner decision and the next time would be a charm.

Anna: And then obviously, I guess, sometimes that didn't work out either. Then, I guess, it's kind of a toss-up, but is there an average on how long these second or third or fourth marriages last? Did you see any pattern in that with how some people, maybe their second marriage lasted a little bit longer than the first or shorter or this or that?

Pam: I did find that all of us started dating right away. We were always looking to be coupled and for that next marriage partner simply because we got married so young we were used to being partnered. The biggest fear that multiple marriers have is this feeling of being alone. This feeling of loneliness. We didn't take much time from our initial marriage to the next one. It was usually an average of about a year or two and sometimes a lot less.

My advice is be comfortable with yourself and enjoy your solitude. It's really important for individuals to make our own sunshine and to get to know your self. One thing that I found that multiple marriers didn't do a good job of, and I can speak for myself, I really didn't look in the rearview mirror. I never really considered what I had done to contribute to the demise of the marriage. I always played the victim. I never took responsibility for my behaviors and actions. I just thought, "Well, we weren't a good match. I chose poorly and the next time I'm going to get it right." I just chalked it up every time to irreconcilable differences and that was good enough for me.

My advice is look back before you go ahead. Take the time to step back and as multiple marriers stop being so impulsive. We're not going out buying a dress in the mall. This is an important life decision every single time you make it.

Anna: In the beginning, when we were first talking, you mentioned a little bit about the woman that you had met that was a multiple marrier and then finally when you got comfortable enough to tell her that you were one yourself. I'm guessing that you felt, maybe, is there a little bit of guilt that comes with multiple marriages? For multiple marries, what type of guilt is carried around and what suggestions do you have for those people who suffer from the constant negative feeling about their relationship and marriage failures?

Pam: Multiple marriers tend to define themselves by relationships and marriages. Again, I know I did. When you go beyond society's acceptance of one to two marriage failure and you have to deal with a third or fourth divorce or even beyond, it's really very natural to carry what I call the guilt baggage along with you. If you have children you're wondering about how those marriage failures are going to affect their opinion of you as a parent.

If you don't have children, like in my case, there are still family members and friends and coworkers to whom you feel like you're always having to justify your lack of success in the marriage arena. Before long, I found that the embarrassment and guilt really caused me to question my self worth and my ability to have a successful relationship in the future. I really find this kind of thinking serves no purpose.

I have a chapter in my book called "Throw the Guilt Out with the Bath Water." I really think it's important, just observe your patterns. Listen to your inner self, learn some new behaviors, get some self-help through workshops or reading. Just start feeling good about yourself and move on. It just serves no purpose to be focusing on the negative and you have a lot of other positives and strengths that you bring to the party. Those are the ones that you need to focus on and move further and further away over time from that negative multiple marrier label.

Anna: As relationships and marriages go specifically, did you find that sometimes there are some red flags that people tend to ignore when it comes to those things?

Pam: Oh, yes. In hindsight I wish I had been aware of those red flags. In my book I include a chart that really compares robust love with what I call destructive love. If you put those two tables side by side those red flags jump right off the page. It's amazing. There are some themes in this chart, and I'll bring out a couple of them.

One is security. If you're in a serious relationship and you find that your partner is pressuring you to provide total attention to him or her or security or that they have anxiety about your growing or changing as an individual, those are big red flags. They're red flags because it's important for your partner to allow you to have the time and space to expand your own horizons and be who you are. That's how you bring balance into the relationship. That's how you have a healthy relationship when you and your partner evolve together. So watch out for this total attention and security red flag.

Another theme is around interest and involvement. Another warning sign would be if you start to see your partner expecting you to spend less and less time with your family and friends so you can devote most or all of your attention to them. Or if you see your partner discouraging you from some sort of self-development thing that's going to bring joy into your life.

Let me give you an example of that. What if I said, "Honey, I'm taking a jewelry course because I want to start designing my own jewelry and selling some of it." And he said to me, "You don't have the time for that. What makes you think you're going to be successful and how do you know you're going to make money doing it anyway? I wouldn't waste my time." That kind of reaction, it seems very harmless, can deflate my emotional balloon really quickly, make me start to have self-doubt, and maybe discourage me from even pursuing that interest or passion. Wouldn't it be so much better if my spouse would say something like, "Wow! I had no idea you were interested in learning to design jewelry. That's really neat! I heard there's a gem show downtown next weekend, let's both go and check it out." Just that little bit of encouragement and support from your spouse can make all the difference in the world toward both of you building a loving and healthy relationship marriage.

Another one is control. I think we touched on that a little bit. It seems harmless, but it's, I think, one of the most dangerous, when in a relationship you have one person who's all about power and control. I read an article recently that said nagging was a bigger marriage buster than infidelity, believe it or not.

Anna: I heard that somewhere, actually. I did.

Pam: I believe on my website I actually have the article. But it really says that constant nagging by one partner to another or finger pointing can really chip away at the marriage over time. You need to watch for this just in the dating scene. If one person seems to emerge more powerful and is always the one making decisions and is always the one who is happy when things are going his or her way, you need to watch out for that.

There are a couple more things, too, that I talk about in my book. Embracing your partner's difference and not trying to change him or her into your own image or to what you think they ought to be. Intimacy goes way beyond the bedroom, too. That's another one a lot of couples do well when things are going their way, but when they have serious or unresolved issues they tend to sweep them under the carpet and hence they tend to have a very superficial marriage. The only way to have a healthy and happy marriage is to address the negative and the positive matters in the marriage and look for fairness along the way and compromise.

Anna: I also notice that there are a lot of different lessons learned in your book. Which one or ones are most important for the listeners to understand?

Pam: I would say there are three really important lessons. First off, understand the motivators for getting married in the first place. I never looked at that. But when I did my self-discovery I found the first time I got married was for independence, the second time was for status, the third time was around the whole notion of loneliness. I couldn't stand to be alone, and the fourth was I was looking for emotional security.

Just recognizing the drivers for your wanting to get married is going to tell you a lot about yourself and your needs. Make sure that you don't need to get married, that you have a desire to get married for all the right reasons. It's really important to have done the work to prepare yourself and your partner. You have to do some work together before you embark upon marriage if you want a sustainable one.

The second thing that I think is super important is really vet yourself. By this, I mean, get to know yourself. What is it that really makes you tick? What is your passion in life? What are your

goals? What are your boundaries? What are your values? I think a lot of people stay so busy in our society today that we never sit down and really find out who we are. You can only have a great relationship or marriage if you come from a position of personal knowledge and strength. In fact, that's going to help you attract the right partner.

I would say finally, then you've got to do a little research and vet your partner as well. You need to find out what excites and motivates him or her. What are their expectations of themselves and of you? How do they handle their finances? How do they react among family members? How do they deal with issues with co-workers? And, I think this is an important one, observe how they face disappointment in their lives. Ask them, "How would you handle illness, particularly if I contracted a serious illness? How would that affect our marriage?"

I think vetting your partner can take weeks, it can take months, it can be a year or two. So I advise people who are thinking about entering into the lifestyle of marriage to take your time because this decision to commit to another individual is one of the most, if not the most important decision that you'll make in your life and you need to take the time to do it. This decision, in terms of choosing your life partner is going to affect your intimate relation with him or her, but it's going to affect the relationships around you and even your career. So it's very important to do some of the things that I mention in my book because I wish I had done them. I would have had one big first successful marriage rather than four little unsuccessful ones.

Anna: Absolutely. Well, Pam, is there anything else we should know?

Pam: No, I would just encourage people to enjoy getting to know one another. Take the time before you decide to marry your partner and just be open to marriage. A lot of people ask me, "Pam, you've been married and divorced four times. Would you ever get married again?" A lot of multiple marriages are through. They really don't want to have another failure. They don't have the confidence to start another marriage. But, for myself I'm open to it. I believe I've learned some important lessons. I have been in an eight and a half year committed relationship that may lead to marriage, and I'm in a place where I don't need to be married. I can desire to be married and I feel like if I decide to take the fifth that it will be a successful one.

Anna: Well, I hope so. For sure. I wish you the best of luck with that.

Pam: Thank you. That may be the title of my next book, "I'll Take the Fifth." You never know.

Anna: Yeah, that would be good. That would be good. Well, Pam, thank you so much for talking with me and being on the show today.

Pam: You're so welcome. It was my pleasure.

Anna: To find out more about Pam and her books as well as her endeavors as a multiple marriage expert, you can visit her website at www.ring-exchange.com. I'll be sure to put a link to that in the show notes so everyone can have access to that.

Thank you so much for joining us today and I hope you'll join us again next week. For more information about this show and future episodes, visit us at stayhappilymarried.com. I'm Anna Riley. 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 comment@stayhappilymarried.com or call us at 919-256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.