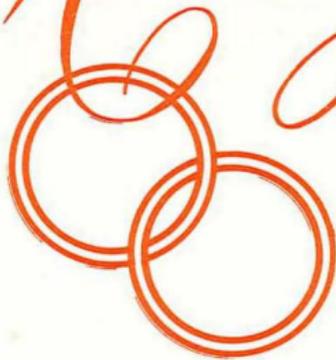


*The Secret
of a Happy
Marriage*



The Secret of a Happy Marriage

by

NORMAN VINCENT PEALE AND RUTH STAFFORD PEALE

THIS MESSAGE has been written by two persons, a husband and wife married for many years who have worked out a formula for success in marriage.

Like every married couple, they have had their problems and difficulties, but through their success formula they have experienced a long and happy married life.

It is not at all necessary for so many people to be suffering through marital troubles and unhappiness. The high incidence of separation and divorce need not continue. Any earnest and right thinking person can enjoy the blessings of happy married life if he seriously desires and will put into practice certain time-tested principles in this most intimate and satisfying of all human relationships.

Some of these principles are outlined in this pamphlet which contains one section by a husband, Norman Vincent Peale, and another by his wife, Ruth Stafford Peale. The formula for a successful marriage which they jointly present worked well for them. It can do likewise for you.

The Adventure of Being a Wife, by Ruth Stafford Peale, first appeared in the *Reader's Digest*, (copyright 1966 by the Reader's Digest Assn., Inc.), and is reprinted here by permission.



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FORMULA FOR SUCCESS IN MARRIAGE

by

NORMAN VINCENT PEALE

MARRIAGE has always had its hazards to success. For it is no simple matter to merge two separate personalities into an intimate relationship with the many adjustments required from each. While marriage comes about from biological motivation, its depth and continuity, indeed its happiness, depend upon emotional, mental and spiritual attitudes. Marriages can be successful, despite the continual advertising given the unsuccessful ones. If some couples break up, so also do many more stay together. And for the reason that they know and practice the formula for success in marriage.

The first element in that formula is **love**, not the sex-oriented love of Hollywood and stage and contemporary fiction, but love in depth, spiritually conditioned and mature. This type of love is perhaps best described in the 13th chapter of First Corinthians. "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous, or conceited, or proud; love is not ill-mannered, or selfish, or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is

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happy with the truth. Love never gives up: its faith, hope and patience never fail. Love is eternal.”

The shack-ups of high society and low, the body cult people, the thin rooted spiritually fail at marriage for the basic reason that the relationship is predicated on a superficial love base. Only spiritual love in depth has what it takes to effect a successful married life.

When love exists in depth other elements in the formula for success in marriage become apparent and applicable. And one of these is **maturity**. Marriage is not for the infantile. We must realize that not a few persons are extremely delayed in emerging from an infantile state of mind and emotion. But many of this type do get married, and the casualty rate of such marriages is very high. Persons lacking in judgment, emotional control and balance are deficient in responsibility. They do not possess the ability to handle and withstand the stresses that appear when the ephemeral moonlight-and-roses phase has passed.

I performed the marriage ceremony for a twenty-year-old couple, a super-beautiful girl and a steady, nice-looking, serious-minded young man. A year later Charlotte was in my office weeping copiously.

“What is the trouble?” I asked.

“Oh, Dr. Peale, Joe just doesn’t make me happy. He is a wonderful person in every way, but I expected he would go all out to make me happy. Instead, he spends every evening studying. He explains that he must do that to get ahead in his job. But he just studies all the time when he should be making me happy.”

I thought this called for a lay-it-on-the-line approach. “Now look, young lady, do you think that the Creator went to all the trouble of bringing Joe into this world and growing him up just for the purpose of making you happy? Can it not be that there is some outstanding pur-

pose for his life and he feels deeply and is trying to work out that purpose?

“What are you anyway, a pretty doll, a fluffy kitten — or are you a woman, a real honest-to-goodness woman? If you want to be happy, be a partner to Joe, a working partner. Study with him. Be a helpmate. Encourage him, talk over the job with him, and the two of you will work up together. Be a team.”

“Why, Dr. Peale, I expected more sympathy from you. Instead, you talk just like my father does.”

“Which proves,” I broke in, “that your father is a wise man.”

Well, anyway, she got the point. Actually, she was made of better stuff than she was showing. She had simply read too much sexy fiction. She surprised Joe by asking him intelligent questions about his job. They did study together, they worked together, and now ten years later they are an extremely happy couple.

Incidentally, I got hold of Joe privately and extracted a promise that he would knock off the studying at least one night a week and take Charlotte out for a happy time. So the infantilism that could have broken up a potentially successful marriage was nipped in the bud and two mature young people made a go of it.

A THIRD important element in the formula for a successful marriage is **appreciation**. William James calls “the desire to be appreciated” one of the strongest drives of human nature. Just how strong it is was demonstrated by the rather extreme case of a man who resigned a good position to accept a job of equal status and pay with a competitor. The employer was bewildered.

Later, the employee told me, “Sure, he raised my salary and the job was a good one. But never in the ten years

that I worked for that man did he once say a word of appreciation to me — not one single word. What does he think I'm doing — just working for money?"

It must be remembered that wives are first of all human beings. And human beings thrive on appreciation. Without it, they wither and die within. The giving of appreciation is such a simple thing, so easy to do. And, moreover, it gives pleasure equally to the giver as well as to the recipient.

So, in a successful marriage a man and woman must do more than love; that is not enough. There must be respect and esteem for each other, thoughtful courtesy and politeness. Any woman will respond to the genuine compliment, to the sincere expression of appreciation. "You look real pretty." "That was a marvelous dinner you cooked tonight." It is meat and drink to her spirit. And the husband will respond likewise. He is not at all immune to the expression of appreciation for all he tries to do or is. I shall never forget the shy but pleased smile on the face of a friend who accompanied me on a trip. His wife has the interesting habit of putting little notes in his pocket when he goes off. Sitting by me in the plane, he reached in his pocket for something and one of those notes came out. He read it and grinned, then very pleased-like handed it to me. It read, "Thank you for just being you."

I think it unnecessary to add that the bond between these two is unbreakable. Appreciation weaves the strands that hold marriages together.

The successful marriage formula will of course include a strong **sense of unity** based on a close association on every level of life: physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. Or, put more explicitly, that couple will work out a satisfying marriage relationship which works together,

plays together, weeps and laughs together, and prays together. They will indeed stick together. But, even more, their relationship will grow deeper and more meaningful with every passing year. They will find increasingly in each other the ultimate values of life: security, support, comfort, romance.

Basic in the marriage success formula is the **spiritual attitude** of a married couple and the place of religion in their home. This is the real foundation that takes up the shocks, the stresses and strains, around which the storms of life beat in vain. Such a marriage is for a fact founded upon a rock. It will endure despite all and everything. The words of the Scripture might very well be engraved above every fireplace or, better still, engraven in the mind: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."

Over many years I have performed the marriage ceremony for hundreds of couples. Always I advise them to begin on their wedding night and continue nightly the habit of **praying together**. Many have heeded this advice and almost invariably these have proved happy marriages. What differences or even quarrels a couple may have, voices raised in irritation or anger tend to fade when each in turn, husband and wife, talks aloud to the Lord in prayer. There is benefit also in a **daily quiet time** during which a husband and wife sit together and think about God, about Jesus Christ, and about how each one can help bring out the best in the other. Read aloud brief Scripture passages in turn and perhaps some inspiring poem. But, mostly, just be with each other alone, quiet and with God.

It is indeed true that the couple that prays together stays together. And that staying together across the years makes life blessed indeed.

THE ADVENTURE OF BEING A WIFE

by

RUTH STAFFORD PEALE

As a minister's wife, I'm asked to speak occasionally to church groups and women's clubs. Quite often, when I do, a woman will come up to me afterward and bewail the monotony of her life. She feels trapped, she's frustrated, her talents are withering on the vine. But what, she adds, with a despairing shrug, can she do? After all, she's only a wife.

Only a wife! At times I feel like taking the woman by the shoulders and shaking her. Here you are, I want to say, caught up in the most marvelous adventure a woman can experience, and you don't know it!

My many years of being a wife have utterly convinced me that no job, no hobby, no activity on earth can compare with the drama and exhilaration of living with a man, loving him, doing your best to understand his infinitely complex mechanism and helping to make it hum and sing and soar the way it was designed to do.

Is this easy? Of course not! It takes skill and selflessness. You have to use your heart and your head. But it can be done, and when it is — well, what *is* adventure? It's the discovery of new powers and new dimensions, the opportunity for self-testing, the happiness that comes from high achievement. These are the promises hidden in every marriage — if only a woman will reach out and claim them.

If I were invited into a young wife's kitchen to have a cup of coffee and talk about what she might do to make and keep her marriage exciting, here are some of the

suggestions I would make.

Study your man, as if he were a strange and rare and fascinating animal — which indeed he is! Study him ceaselessly, because he will be constantly changing. Take pride in his strengths and achievements, but analyze his areas of weakness, too. Before my two daughters were married, I told them: "You have fallen in love. You're dazzled by a man's brilliance, his confidence, his charm. You have yet to encounter his uncertainties and inadequacies. But this is where you can *really* love him, *really* help him, *really* be a wife. So don't be dismayed or disillusioned when you discover these aspects of him."

Respect his work. When you marry a man, you also marry his job. At times you may even feel that the job comes before you. It doesn't, really, but doing his work well means as much to a man as motherhood does to a woman — and for much the same reasons.

Learn the tricky and challenging art of absorption. A lot of unsuccessful wives seem to regard themselves as divinely appointed receiving stations for love. They're constantly concerned with how much attention and affection they're getting. Certainly a wife is entitled to love and loyalty. But she also has to be ready to absorb irritability on the part of her husband at times, flashes of displaced anger, discontent with his own performance. These things have to find an outlet somewhere. If a wife can think of herself as a kind of lightning rod that conducts fear and frustration harmlessly into the ground, not only will she be of inestimable value to her husband but she will grow tremendously as a person herself.

And remember: Even when a man becomes successful, and knows it, some hidden, sensitive, unsure part of him continues to need the unquestioning support and loyalty of a loving woman. Perhaps it's a remnant in him of the

little boy who once turned to his mother for reassurance. Whatever it is, it's there.

Practice the art of listening. Most men desperately need a sounding board against which to test ideas, hopes, dreams, ambitions, problems, inner conflicts that they can't resolve alone. They need a feminine listener, one to whom they can confide their innermost thoughts and feelings without fear of ridicule or rejection.

Creative listening involves response, communication, exchange of ideas. But there are also times when a wife has to be silent, has to bite her tongue, hold back the sharp word that will turn an argument into a fight, or a bad situation into a worse one. No doubt her husband has an equal responsibility. But I think that a man's job, basically, is to tame the world; a wife's job is to control herself — and indirectly her husband.

Let him know that you need him. Not long ago an outraged young wife told me that she was fed up with her husband's roving eye. She was going to tell him off, divorce him if he so much as looked at another woman. I said to her, "Do you really want a solution to all this? Then go to your husband. Ask him to put his arms around you. When he does, say to him, 'Darling, I'm hurt. I'm unhappy, and I think you know why. I'm your wife. Please hold me. Please help me.' That's all you have to do. The admission of your need of his love will work miracles where no amount of anger can. Try it; you will see."

Use your talents. Marriage need not limit your horizons. If you have a gift for design, or photography, or decorating, or writing poetry — any talent at all — don't let it gather dust; use it to expand your marriage.

A brilliant girl I know, who graduated *magna cum laude* and went on to graduate work, now has three small

children and all the attendant household chores. "I need every single thing I learned in college," she maintains, "to understand my husband's business, to run his home efficiently and to keep myself aware of what's going on in the world."

There are so many little common sense don'ts that help a wife to make marriage an adventure. For example, don't make an issue over small things. Overlook them and you will find that your opinion carries a lot more weight in big things!

Don't be afraid to compromise — compromise doesn't mean giving in. It's simply an adult way of acknowledging that there are points of view other than your own in this complex world, and realizing that some of them occasionally may be right.

Don't be alarmed if you and your husband differ about some things. Marriage is a partnership, not a merger of identities. One of the happiest women I know, a rock-ribbed Republican, has a husband who gave up a lucrative job to work for a Democratic administration. "No problem," she says cheerfully. "I married a man, not a set of political beliefs." And he accepts their differences just as calmly.

Don't keep fretting over irretrievable mistakes. Everybody makes them. The best thing to do is learn from them and then forget them. I must say, some women seem to be incapable of this — especially if their husbands are guilty of the errors.

There are many small common-sense dos as well as don'ts. Expand and develop the art of sharing — not just the big, serious things, but the little, delightful things: the book you're reading, the joke that you hear and hoard for him, the sunset you call him out to watch, the entrancing, unbelievable thing your three-year-old said. Even

shared exasperation can be fun!

Perhaps the simplest and most inclusive of all rules for successful wives is this: try to please your husband. Does he like neatness? You can be neat. Does he like friends around him? Learn to entertain. Is his job a stressful one? Make his home an oasis of quietness in a noisy world. Does he want you around? Thank heaven — and be available. This kind of concern is an expression of love, and it's impossible to give it without having it reflected back.

"To love and to cherish, till death us do part . . ." This is the great, soul-satisfying role of a wife. And never make the mistake of thinking it a secondary role. Where the ship of matrimony is concerned, your husband may be the motor, but you're the rudder — and it's the rudder that determines where the ship will go!

A FINAL WORD

Every idea and principle suggested in the foregoing has been tried and proved effective in our own marriage. In this pamphlet neither of us is advancing supposition or theory. We have worked at our marriage on the basis of what we have written. And we are still working on them, for a marriage is a continual adjustment no matter its length. We know by personal experience that the principles herein will work, for we have worked them successfully.

Norman Vincent Peale
Ruth Stafford Peale