

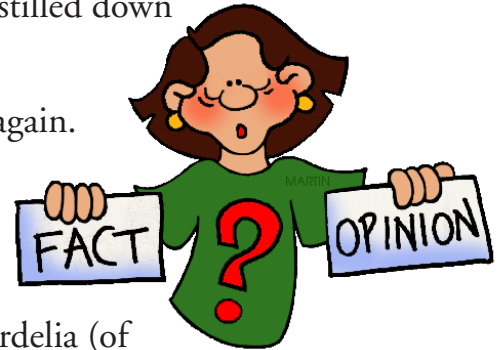
How to Stay Married

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Moderator: Erin Byars • Panelists: Gail Swindle, Laura Morrow and Roy Gotta

I'm going to tell a story. Many of you will listen to this story and think, this is interesting but it could never happen to me and my partner! We've been married too long/we're too close/we'd never let things go that far. Unfortunately, I have watched this exact scenario re-enact itself over, and over, and over. If you think about it, you probably know of more than one couple who had "the perfect marriage" but are no longer together. I've seen 25-year relationships implode, and 40-year marriages just disintegrate. While the details are always different, the basic problems can almost always be distilled down to the following facts.

Please listen carefully as we discuss a tragedy we've seen over and over again.

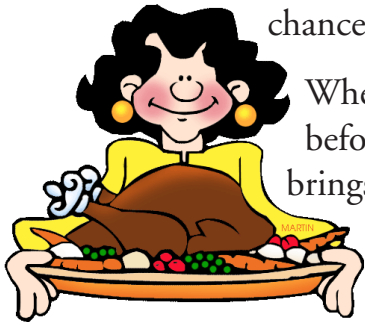


How it starts...

Let's meet our caller and partner – we'll use the names Marvin and Cordelia (of course, it could be Amaryllis and Waylon, or Bruce and Austin... but you get the idea).

Marvin and Cordelia are not newlyweds; they have been married about fifteen years and have a couple of kids at home. Not long ago, Marvin decided it might be fun to try square dance calling! Cordelia is his biggest fan and encouraged him to go for it.

As it turns out, Marvin is a natural. He understands all the fundamentals right away, sings quite pleasantly and has great mic presence. Before too long, he is filling in for other callers when they are traveling. Then a small club loses their caller and asks him to be their club caller. It's a bit of the drive but the chance to gain experience is too good to pass up, so he takes it.



When Marvin is calling, Cordelia is right there with him. She makes sure he is fed beforehand and that he has crisply ironed shirts. She helps him set up his equipment, brings him coffee and checks the level of his sound. Marvin really appreciates everything Cordelia does for him, but when he is calling he has to think of 21 things at all times, so he seldom remembers to tell her how he feels.

When there is a break, all the dancers want to talk to him, whether it is to ask questions about a move or just let him know how impressed they are at his rapid improvement. Cordelia understands how distracted Marvin is but it still eats at her a bit. She sits quietly and begins to feel useless and unimportant.

Several weeks later, Cordelia thinks, "You know, maybe if I stayed home once Marvin would realize how much he needs me there." So she tells him she has a headache, or couldn't find a baby-sitter. Marvin is very disappointed but he doesn't want to seem selfish – after all, they used to enjoy dancing together but now the spotlight is on Marvin – so he doesn't tell Cordelia how much he missed having her with him. Cordelia, thinking he doesn't care whether she attends or not, continues to stay



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home. The misunderstanding on both sides pushes the couple further and further apart.

With this relationship hanging by a thread one more shove is all it will take to push it past the point of no return. You know that caller who gets water all over the bathroom, leaves his dirty socks on the floor and puts the empty milk carton back in the refrigerator? Well, when he steps on the stage, into the spotlight, he becomes the most desirable human being on the planet. And the man who would never have considered straying a few years before, thinks about the partner who is not with him, the one he thinks doesn't care anymore, and decides he deserves someone who is interested in what's important to him. And it's over.

Let's say I believe you, what can we do?



- Talk to each other! Don't hold back your feelings. Share your reactions to every situation and make sure your partner understands them.
- Before the calling schedule gets busy, sit down and discuss what each partner's expectations are – how much family time will be devoted to square dancing and calling? Does the caller want the partner to accompany them all the time, or just some of the time? Are there other duties the caller would like the partner to be responsible for, such as managing the calendar or negotiating with clubs?

Will the kids be involved – and how often? How much time should be set aside for family plans or “date nights”?

- One of the most important discussions concerns how much of the family income will be used for calling equipment, music, clothing, travel, etc. The accoutrements of calling can be expensive, and it is amazing how quickly the investment can get out of hand.
- How and when to offer comments and criticism is an important skill. Some comments are important but not urgent. Does the caller need this information to make the rest of the dance successful, or is it something you can discuss later? More often than not, saving criticism until the following day is the best choice.
- Most of us would prefer to dance with our partner over anyone else. When your partner becomes a caller, there will be lots of times when they will be “otherwise occupied.” Let your caller know whether or not you would like to dance. One caller I knew used to introduce his wife like this – “This is my wife, Susie, and she loves to dance!” Worked every time.



Callers, make sure you introduce your partner at every event. It lets your partner know you value them, and informs the dancers as well.

The key – communication! And more communication. Did I mention talking things over? Sometimes it seems so difficult, but no where near as tough as divorce.