

Making marriage work

May 2011



This week I celebrated a 24-year wedding anniversary. But in the scheme of things, that really doesn't mean much. The separation of *Arnold Schwarzenegger* and *Maria Shriver* comes after 25 years of marriage.

Marriage is hard work, especially when you work hard. My husband needs a lot more attention from me than I need from him and I have to regularly remind myself of that. I see lots of people who don't make time or effort for their marriage and then wonder why their spouse has gone elsewhere for attention. Heading into summer wedding season, I thought I would weigh in on work life balance when it comes to marriage.

Below are ways to avoid the work obstacles that can sabotage a relationship. For my full Miami Herald column on marriage, [click here](#).

When paths diverge. A 21st century marriage typically comes after both spouses are established in jobs. When one partner reaches a greater level of career success or the opposite, drops out of the workforce, the new dynamic can open the door for resentment. **Jodi Furr Colton, an attorney with the marriage and family law group at Fort Lauderdale's Brinkley Morgan,** says by the time couples arrive at her office, "they are living in two different worlds." She advises, "It's important to communicate dissatisfaction in a way that's not judgmental."

Unemployment or setbacks at work: The recession has shown Americans that even high-powered executives are vulnerable to job or financial loss. A bride or groom can no longer go into a marriage with lifelong expectations of lifestyle or job security. "A spouse will come in and say, 'When I married you, you had money and now you don't. You promised and can't deliver,'" says Furr Colton.

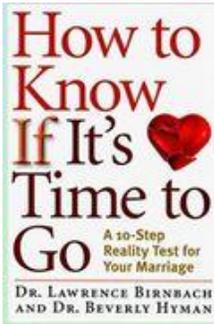


Division of chores. Just like in the workplace, a spouse can get resentful if one carries more workload. Newlywed Candice Fong, 34, says she's starting now to prepare her marriage for the years ahead when kids are part of the mix. Fong and new husband Leonardo Cicarelli have lived together since August. They began divvying up the chores immediately. "We were both used to doing things on our own so it's been a challenge," she says. "I want to work this out before we have kids." **Helen Fong,** Candice's mother and a successful Miami wedding planner, says it's the sharing and working as a team that strengthens marriages. "If a bride or groom has a lot of demands and expectations, it doesn't work out."

Misguided priorities: Both people in a marriage have to commit to building in time for fun and intimacy -- to encouraging sex and accepting sexual advances. According to a national survey commissioned by [Care.com](#), 64 percent of working parents revealed that they are too stressed from managing their jobs and their families to have sex with their spouses.

Conflict resolution. A conflict at work, if improperly handled, can cost you a promotion or worse, your job. The same goes in marriage. Experts have found a lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve conflicts. Fighting in the first year of marriage is not predictive of divorce. A University of Michigan study of

373 couples over a span of 16 years found rather, it's a couple's fight style that may lead to divorce. Avoid the most dangerous pattern — when one partner tries to analyze a situation or disagreement and the other withdraws.



Balance: In a 24/7 work world, boundaries keep work from spilling over at home. “It’s heartbreaking when spouses get together and one has the feeling that their partner is here physically but his or her heart and mind is at office,” says [Beverly Hyman](#), a management consultant and the other co-author of [How to Know If It’s Time to Go: A 10-Step Reality Test for Your Marriage](#). A huge pitfall is one partner becomes so immersed in work that he or she unconsciously sees a spouse as a source of stress, or worse, turns to work to avoid a spouse. Bringing work stress home, venting non-stop, can also be a problem. Hyman advises compartmentalizing. “When you are at work, work owns you. When you walk out, leave it behind.”

<http://miamiherald.typepad.com/worklifebalancingact/2011/05/making-marriage-work.html>