

## No Time for Love?

As the counseling session wrapped up, Sandy asked if we could schedule our next appointment for two weeks out instead of one. That way they would have more time to do their 'homework' and practice the communication skills they were learning.

"Yeah," said Sandy's husband, Mark, "We're so busy we have to come to counseling to just to have a date!"

For many couples today, their biggest relationship problem is finding time to *have* a relationship. If this sounds like you, you might be telling yourself it will all be different after the wedding. But will it? Wedding planning eats up a lot of time, that's for sure. But many couples find that the problem of 'no time for love' lingers long after the guests have gone home.

Too many couples today end up feeling more like project managers than lovers.

"Our conversations go like this," said Caroline. "Did you remember to call the insurance agent? No, I'll try to do it this morning. Should I write the check for the mortgage? That would be great. Can you pick up Derek from day care by 6:00? No, my meeting will probably run late. If you get him, I'll pick up dinner on my way home.' We sound like we're partners running a mini-corporation!"

Not only does it take time to have fun, it takes time to have sex. (Hey, someone's got to say it!) Couples are often puzzled about why sex ends up at the bottom of their list. One reason is that the list is too long! To put it in a nutshell, down time is sexy. Relaxing is sexy. Multi-tasking is not.

People forget how much time they used to set aside for each other when they were dating. Whole evenings just to get to know each other. Whole weekends just to enjoy each other. And there were no bills to pay and no chores to do, because you didn't have joint responsibilities. Dates automatically felt like mini-vacations. When you share a household, you don't get that feeling quite so automatically. You have to make a point to create it.

At this point in your life, the 'chores' may be more related to the wedding. But you can still get caught up in the same dynamic of all work and no play. And for many engaged couples, their 'dark secret' is that they're so stressed, their sex life has dwindled. (Sometimes I wonder, does this have anything to do with the skeptical attitude a lot of men have about weddings? After all, how many men would raise their hands in favor of more shopping and less sex?)

Whether you've been married for years, like Sandy and Mark, or whether you're still looking forward to your wedding, the time for finding more time for love is now. Here are some pointers to get you going in the right direction.

### **Be Ruthless.**

About setting priorities, I mean. Finding time to nurture your relationship requires a laser-like focus on what's really important to you. Just because that board is for a cause you believe in doesn't mean you need to be on it. Just because you love yoga AND aerobics AND weight training AND Pilates doesn't mean you should do all of them. And just because you get invited to great parties doesn't mean you should always say yes.

For a lot of under 35's, the social whirl is intense. They're living a college-style social life, while trying to launch careers, go to school, maybe even start a family. This manic socializing is partly a way to explore the world—and themselves. As they venture into new situations, they ask themselves, "Is this my tribe? Are these my values? Is this how I want to live?"

If you've decided to marry, you've found some of the answers to those questions. So you might want to ask yourself, "Do I really want to keep up this pace?" I'm not saying you should forget about trying new things. Just that you may have clearer priorities that you did a few years ago and you might want to trim your commitments to reflect them.

### **Go Ahead and Say It: "NO!"**

To maintain your laser-like focus, you're going to need the skill of saying, "NO." For a year, my friend Karen chaired a committee for an organization of small business owners. At the end of that year, she realized that while rewarding in many ways, the job took a lot of time away from more important activities. When the board president asked her to sign up for the next year, she said, "No, I'm not planning on being the chair again next year." There was a pause and the president said, "Oh, really? But you did such a good job. Why don't you want to do it again?" Karen answered, "It just doesn't fit with my goals for this year."

No reasons, no rationalizations, just: This isn't my priority. Sounds gutsy, doesn't it? And it does take guts, if you've never tried it. But believe me, the sky won't fall and people won't think you're a terrible, selfish person. You might be surprised to find that they actually respect you more. And the feeling you get when you stand up for your own priorities can be very exhilarating.

### **Find the 'Good Enough' Point**

Bob had an "Aha!" moment when he realized that he puts stress on his relationship by his desire to optimize every situation.

"I realized that instead of going to three grocery stores to find the lowest price on every item, it would be better for my relationship if I got home a half hour earlier. I can save that kind of energy for bigger things, like shopping for a new car."

If you're a high achiever, the drive to optimize can be a tempting trap. Whatever you're doing, you want to do the best possible job. The problem is you can end up shooting yourself in the foot. Saving those pennies (or searching 10 different stores for the perfect wedding invitations) eats up your precious time.

If this sounds like you, try asking yourself, "What's the 'good enough point' for this project?" In wedding planning, you may want to optimize when it comes to your gown. A lot of brides have very strong feelings about THE DRESS. (I know—I was one of them!) But it's worth asking yourself, "Do I really care that much about every single part of my wedding?" Your 'good enough point' for favors or flowers may be different. Every time you identify the 'good enough point' of a task, you buy yourself time for that part of your life that really does deserve optimization—your relationship.

### **Create New Traditions Now**

Right now you're creating patterns that will carry on into your married life. If you're not spending enough time with each other now, I would bet big money that I could drop in on you a year from now and you'd have the same problem. So why not deliberately create traditions that will keep you connected as you move into the future?

One tradition that works for a lot of busy couples is "date night." That's one way to get that mini-vacation feeling again. And I know a number of couples that save Sundays for their partners. No matter how crowded their schedule gets or how many demands they have, they always know that they will have that one day together.

Another good way to stay connected to your partner is to develop hobbies together. Take up golf or salsa dancing together, and you've just cut way back on the planning. You've made having fun together an automatic part of your schedule.

These ideas have helped my clients balance their lives and carve out more time for each other. Why don't you give them a try and see what happens? Begin now to make time for love, so later on you won't have to come to a counseling appointment just to get a date.

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