

Seven Ways to Ruin Your Marriage

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TYLER, Texas—No couple sets out with the goal of destroying their marriage in mind, but—unfortunately—that’s the position in which many have found themselves these days.

Maybe if we could recognize the actions and attitudes that are undermining our relationships early enough, we could change our ways before it’s too late.

So in that spirit, I offer the following list of seven marriage-destroying habits, along with the worldly wisdom most frequently used to justify them.

- Put yourself first.

Always look out for No. 1. Make everything about you. Prioritize your needs and marginalize your spouse’s. If you have children, lavish all your attention on them and devote as little energy to nurturing your marriage as possible (preferably none).

- Dwell on the flaws.

Focus all your attention on those things your spouse does that most annoy you. Cultivate an attitude of continual irritation. Blind yourself to any good traits and zero in on the bad ones. Who cares if he’s a hard worker if he can’t balance a checkbook? What does it matter if she’s a loving and devoted mother if she’s also a complete slob?

- Assume the worst.

Assign a malignant motive to anything your spouse does that you don’t like. Someone who truly loves you would know how much such behavior bothers you and stop doing it. Convince yourself your spouse is acting that way on purpose just to tick you off.

- Refuse to forgive.

Whenever your spouse forgets your anniversary or says something rude or leaves a mess for you to clean up, harbor as much resentment as you can

muster. Glare at your offender with disapproval or, better yet, turn a cold shoulder. The longer you hold a grudge, the less likely your spouse will be to make the same mistake in the future.

■ Withhold respect.

Respect, like love, should never be given unconditionally. Award it sparingly, and only when earned. Train your spouse to strive for perfection. The harder it is to win your approval, the more appreciative your partner will be once you grant it. (Until then, feel free to disparage the poor performer as much as you like, both to his face and behind his back.)

■ Remain aloof.

You don't have to be physically intimate to have a good marriage. The sooner you both understand that, the better. If your partner is in the mood and you aren't, suggest a cold shower. Make enough excuses, and your spouse will eventually give up and stop bugging you about it.

■ Cast blame.

Never accept personal responsibility for any of the problems in your marriage. Point your finger, instead. Even your own poor attitudes can be pinned on your spouse. If he were doing a better job, you wouldn't react the way you do. If she'd get her act together, yours would quickly follow.

You needn't master all seven of these strategies to wreck your marriage. Just doing one or two of them habitually is enough to make most couples miserable.

So, if any of the wrongheaded reasoning above resonates with you, you may be closer than you think to ruining what might otherwise have been a beautiful relationship.

Of course, if you'd rather nurture your marriage than destroy it, then simply do the opposite of the list above.

■ Put spouse before self.

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4).

■ Focus on the positive.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

■ Believe the best.

"[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:7-8).

- Forgive freely.

“Bear with each other and forgive any complaint you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13).

- Be generous with love and respect.

“However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33).

- Nurture intimacy.

“The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband . . . Stop depriving one another” (1 Corinthians 7:3-5).

- Admit failings.

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).