



The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert

John M. Gottman , Nan Silver

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Just as Masters and Johnson were pioneers in the study of human sexuality, so Dr. John Gottman has revolutionized the study of marriage. As a professor of psychology at the University of Washington and the founder and director of the Seattle Marital and Family Institute, he has studied the habits of married couples in unprecedented detail over the course of many years. His findings, and his heavily attended workshops, have already turned around thousands of faltering marriages.

This book is the culmination of his life's work: the seven principles that guide couples on the path toward a harmonious and long-lasting relationship. Straightforward in their approach, yet profound in their effect, these principles teach partners new and startling strategies for making their marriage work. Gottman helps couples focus on each other, on paying attention to the small day-to-day moments that, strung together, make up the heart and soul of any relationship. Being thoughtful about ordinary matters provides spouses with a solid foundation for resolving conflict when it does occur and finding strategies for living with those issues that cannot be resolved.

Packed with questionnaires and exercises whose effectiveness has been proven in Dr. Gottman's workshops, **The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work** is the definitive guide for anyone who wants their relationship to attain its highest potential.

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work is the result of Dr. John Gottman's many years of closely observing thousands of marriages. This kind of longitudinal research has never been done before. Based on his findings, he has culled seven principles essential to the success of any marriage.

Maintain a love map.

Foster fondness and admiration.

Turn toward instead of away.

Accept influence.

Solve solvable conflicts.

Cope with conflicts you can't resolve.

Create shared meaning.

Dr. Gottman's unique questionnaires and exercises will guide couples on the road to revitalizing their marriage, or making a strong one even better.

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert Details

Date : Published May 5th 2015 by Harmony (first published January 1st 1999)

ISBN : 9780553447712

Author : John M. Gottman , Nan Silver

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Marriage, Relationships, Self Help, Psychology

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Dana says

An excellent book that I think married and single people who would like to one day marry should read! John Gottman and Nan Silver studied marriages for over twenty years, following the same couples. They observed how the couples talked to each other...the every day chit chat, the serious conversations and even the fights. What they curiously observed is that fighting is not what breaks marriages up. In fact, fighting can be good for marriages in some ways.

What they did find is that in the couples who remained married and reported being happily married, there were elements of behavior present that aided in getting through disagreements and fights. In the marriages that ended or were unhappy, there were elements that were also present that contributed to the breakdown of the relationship.

I learned a lot from reading this book. I studied law before I began practicing it, so why not study marriage before embarking on a lifetime with someone?

The best part of the book is that if you and your partner are BOTH willing to do so, you can learn to incorporate the seven principles into your life together so that you can love each other, even when you are in disagreement or a difficult time.

It's in workbook style, so it takes some work if you read it as a couple, but if you're open minded and you make yourself vulnerable to your mate, it's worth the process!

Billie Pritchett says

John Gottman's *Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* provides in detail the ways in which a person could have a healthy marriage and by extension the principles also generally apply to romantic relationships in general and perhaps even just friendships. I'll put this principles in my own words to make them more perspicuous; you can read the book if you want his words.

The first principle is to increase your knowledge about each other. You ought to be able to know, for example, who your significant other doesn't like at work. You should also know his or her life philosophy. And what her deepest dreams are. Etc.

The second principle is about nurturing your fondness and admiration for each other. This involves first looking at your partner worthy of dignity and respect. Too often in a relationship you can get hung up on how you don't like your partner's habits or you don't like some of these fundamental differences in attitude he or she has from you. By focusing again on your partner's positive characteristics, reminding yourself why you like or love this person in the first place, will help you re-center your relationship.

The third principle is turning to your partner to communicate about the mundane stuff of life. If you haven't begun to or forgotten how to enjoy talking to your partner about your everyday activities or his or her everyday activities, it would be good to re-light that fire, to just be able to talk about work, problems, what you have been thinking about lately, what you saw that day, etc. Gottman writes that everyday you cherish this time and you act encouraging toward your partner at this time, it is like putting money in the emotional bank, which really helps when time gets tough.

The fourth principle is letting your partner influence you. Since a relationship is give-and-take, and since it would be a mathematical impossibility for you to be right all the time, be willing to let your partner's decision influence what you think or your actions or whatever. Allowing for this give-and-take and not being obstinate goes a long way.

The fifth principle is solving your solvable problems. Some of the problems, say maybe 30%, of the problems you have are solvable problems. This is because they are mainly situational problems. If you begin to make changes in your schedule with respect to each other, or in little ways of doing things, you will be able to deal with each other a lot more easily.

The sixth principle is "overcoming gridlock." Probably about 70% of the problems that a couple has together is a matter of deep fundamental differences you two have. It is okay to have differences. For example, perhaps you are someone who is always interested in saving money and your partner is someone who is always interested in having a good time (which occasionally means that spending money won't be an important issue for him or her). You won't be able to change each other about these deep fundamental issues, so it calls for a compromise; this is "overcoming gridlock." You can begin to make compromises regarding this, say, by making a budget together and then allowing each other to freely spend within that budget. (Perhaps this isn't the best example, but it's the best I could do for the moment.) The important thing is that you work to compromise and get through these differences.

The seventh principle is creating "shared meaning." This might not seem very specific, but what Gottman means is that you create a culture in which the two of you live, and if you have children within the three, four, five, nth number of you live. You create rituals for yourself, you celebrate special holidays, you honor certain rites of passage, you create duties and obligations and practices for yourself within your family unit. This is the real, deep stuff that one might call spiritual.

Gottman provides a lot of activities and exercises throughout the way, little games that you can play with your partner or with other couples to improve and increase the strength of your relationship. This is a wonderful wonderful book.

r.b says

If I could I would give this book 1.5 stars, but I will round up to 2.

I got curious about this book when my supervisor mentioned that she wants to go to one of Gottman's trainings as he is a relationship expert.

I nearly quit reading when I got to the recommendation to tell my partner 'poor baby' when said partner has gotten in trouble for being late to work. I was astounded by this suggestion. I really expected to read a - "just kidding" - somewhere in the text. As a therapist and also speaking as someone who is (quite happily)

married, I think it is important to help one another aim for maturity...not to mention ethics/morals and oh-say adherence to work policies. Saying 'poor baby' and then resorting to gossip and unifying hateful statements (I'm not making this up, this really is in the book) just to strengthen a connection between two people sounds like enmeshment/fusion and flat out immaturity to me.

This strengthening the connection between the spouses notion gets repeated in his advice on dealing with in-law tensions; he asserts that the solution to this common conflict is "for the husband to side with his wife against his mother"...adding that one of the basic tasks of marriage is to establish a sense of "we-ness" between the husband and wife. So the husband must let his mother know that the wife does indeed come first." Again, to me this sounds like it would indeed bring a husband and wife closer together, but at what cost? Furthermore, to promote we-ness seems rooted in anxiety; imagine instead to aim for a thoughtful, creative, loving, and mature connection with another person, where both people in the marriage can think independently and not always have to aim to please the other spouse.

The book left me wondering if the couples who do resort to gossip, choosing spouses over their families of origin and saying "poor baby" to one another end up rather alienated from many of the other important and meaningful relationships in their lives.

The language and content are heteronormative and this got a bit annoying.

Otherwise, there are some really great suggestions mixed into this book. His thoughts on how to predict divorce were interesting and many of his thoughts and exercises on how to get unstuck from perceived perpetual conflicts seemed useful.

Lindsay says

I first read about Gottman's marriage research in Maclom Gladwell's Blink. Since I am interested in all things social science, I picked up this book at the library. The content is interesting and applicable, even if some/much of it feels common sense. The biggest downfall of the book is Gottman's egoistic prose. (He *has* been at the forefront of research in his field - and I would have believed him the *first* time he mentioned it.)

Lars says

I haven't read a lot of marital counselling books, yet I feel good about claiming that this one is the best one out there. This has been one of the most enlightening and thought-provoking books I've ever read. The best part is: It's simple and practical. He doesn't dwell on complex theories of romantic love and its components -he focuses on what's been shown to make marriages work.

Rachelle says

I probably should rank this book higher. I think the principles are sound and obviously well researched. I imagine that everything he says in here is true. It's just not the kind of marriage book that inspires me. It is too much of "do this and don't do this" rather than providing inspiration and perspective on marriage. For example one chapter talks about chores that he does/she does and contains a list of chores that you can go

through with your spouse to determine what is fair. Stuff like that really ends up making me far more stressed about the issue than I was before. Some of the exercises look like fun and/or helpful and I do think this book could really be good if a couple sat down and did it together. I like the part where he talks about how happily married couples don't necessarily have to "solve" every problem and that clear communication (i.e. using "I" statements) is not necessarily the key to marital bliss. There were some good parts... it just really wasn't my cup o' tea.

John Brown says

Back in April of this year, Dr. Liz Hale, a licensed clinical psychologist, started her remarks to a local audience of more than 100 mental health professionals by saying, "Dear fellow colleagues, you are in danger of having an affair."

Her point was that every marriage, even those of the marriage gurus, is vulnerable to infidelity—be it sexual or emotional. Individuals have to actively curb all the subtle and often innocent beginnings that lead to unfaithfulness.

"We make the mistake of thinking (marital) vows will keep us safe; and they don't," she said. She went on to say that couples cannot depend on love or similarities to keep their marriage intact. It's not enough.

Emotional or sexual infidelity isn't as rare as we might think. But even if we don't stray into some type of unfaithfulness, that doesn't mean a marriage will stay together. Like anything worth having, a good relationship takes work.

But what kind of work? What are the key principles for making a marriage last?

For many years the prescriptions of marriage gurus were based on anecdotal evidence and rules of thumb—on opinion. Because the opinions weren't tested, they led to all sorts of errors. For example, many yet believe that the road to marital bliss is through communication, specifically through successful conflict resolution. According to this idea, happy couples are those that have learned to resolve all their conflicts in a nice manner. The problem is that when conflict resolution was put to the test, the studies showed it didn't work. Marriage therapies based on conflict resolution share a very low success rate—over the long haul they only work about 20% of the time.

So what does work?

John Gottman is a marriage counselor who took a different approach and started to collect rigorous scientific evidence on over 650 couples, tracking the fate of their marriages for up to fourteen years. The results of his work are startling.

He uncovered a number of relationship myths, including the one about communication. He found that happy marriages were never perfect unions. These satisfied couples often had differences in temperament, interests, and family values. They argued over money, kids, and housekeeping, just like unhappy couples did. They had problems and faced issues. However, all these satisfied couples also practiced seven principles, even if they didn't know it, which helped them navigate their way through all the difficulties and keep their marriages happy and stable.

And it's not just opinion. The success rate for the type of marital therapy based on his research is 80%. He knows what makes marriages work and has written it up in a fabulous book called *The Seven Principles For Making A Marriage Work*.

Every marriage is vulnerable to failure. It takes work to enjoy a satisfying relationship with a spouse. But it's so much easier to improve and maintain a relationship when you're working on the things that actually make a difference. If you want to improve your marriage, give Gottman's book a read.

Jared says

My favorite quote in the whole book: "Working briefly on your marriage every day will do more for your health and longevity than working out at a health club" (p. 261).

Overall, one of the better books I've seen on fostering a happy marriage. A very useful read for any couple seeking to improve their conflict resolution skills or just strengthen their relationship. Gottman's principles are supported by some of the best research anywhere on marital relations, although he's obviously very proud of his research (e.g., frequent statements like "I don't have to guess anymore about why some couples stay so happily married. *I know why.*")

Some of the highlights:

- * Distinction between perpetual and solvable problems in marriages; most problems fall in the "perpetual" (unresolvable) category and are often a rehashing of some fundamental personal and marital issues that need to be carefully addressed.
- * Happily married couples can have significant disagreements and arguments; it's the way these arguments are conducted (maintaining respect, avoiding criticism, being willing to be influenced by your spouse) that matters. In other words, it's not that couples with strong marriages don't argue or disagree, it's that they do so in a spirit of respect and quick reconciliation. A strong foundation of real friendship in marriage makes this possible.
- * You can't save your marriage just by learning to communicate more sensitively; being an empathetic communicator helps, but it's not the most critical thing in resolving conflicts.
- * The "Four Horsemen" of significant marital problems: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling (very common tactic in men).

This book would be one of my first recommendations for couples seeking to improve their relationship.

Edward says

Why is it considered normal to consult a manual and put work into maintaining a car, but not a relationship?

This book can be pretty cheesey a lot of the time, but it contains lots of exercises, is easy to read, and is based on principles and evidence that is highly regarded in the field (which surprised me).

From his experimental "love lab", Gottman observed tons of couples that worked and didn't. His findings inform the book. Some nuggets:

- most arguments cannot be resolved
- biggest predictors of divorce are: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, failure of repair attempts, and stonewalling.
- an affair is a sign, not a cause, of marital problems
- having the first baby decreases marital satisfaction most times!
- foster admiration and fondness of each other
- men don't allow in women's influence enough
- solve your solvable problems, such as: stress, inlaws (be a husband first, son second), money, sex (person with least interest should have most control), housework, and becoming parents ("A child is a grenade").
- overcome "gridlock" on unsolvable conflicts, basically trying to cope as best you can
- create shared meaning

Mike says

I wanted to dislike this book. The title looks like a bald-faced rip-off of Stephen Covey and the author seems to think he's the only person who has ever had a profound thought about marriage. Gottman proclaims that his ideas are different, but there are many similarities between his prescriptions and those of the therapists he disdains. Still, my full head of righteous indignation was wasted, because Gottman won me over by the end.

First, some background. Early in my own marriage I took a series of parenting classes taught by our community's own black-belt of child raising, Linda Jessup. While the focus was parenting, the skills and concepts are the same for marriage (actually they also work at the office, hiring contractors for your house, and many other situations). In these classes I learned many of the skills mentioned in the book, and I can honestly say much of the happiness in my life derives from those early classes.

Anyone who has talked to me about relationships has heard me talk about what I call the "OTMC" ("One True Method of Communication"). I learned it from Linda, but I found it to be one of the few consistent threads in all the self-help books I've read. The OTMC goes as follows: "When you do _____, I feel ____". It takes some practice, and can easily be misused (things like, "When you act like an idiot, I feel like strangling you" are not the OTMC!), but it really does work. While Gottman initially distances himself from the OTMC, he comes around eventually and I did learn a lot from his treatment ("re-learned" is more accurate). Gottman does a good job explaining that there is more to the OTMC than the sentence structure. These include avoiding what he calls the "harsh startup", and avoiding the words "always" and "never".

Linda used to say, "It's easier to build a relationship on respect than on love." Gottman expands on this, and I think he's spot on. He says he can tell the state of a couple's marriage in three minutes of observation. At first I thought that statement was arrogant and far-fetched, but as I read, and remembered Linda's saying, plus the observations I've made of couples I know, I now think it's probably true. Another area of agreement between Linda and Gottman is the concept of the "emotional bank account". I particularly like his concept of "letting

your partner influence you". I also liked the idea of "love maps" and the exercises which probe how much you know of the inner thoughts and history of your partner.

I think Linda would approve of this book. What I'm not so sure about is whether you can learn these skills effectively from a book. Gottman gives many examples of untrained partners in his book, but that's not a complete substitute for a trained instructor who can find examples in your own life. Also, the exercises you need to perform to become "trained" are likely to make you feel awkward and uncomfortable, so book readers may skip them. In a class, everybody is embarrassed, but you get through it.

Adam says

If you can get past Gottman's ego in the first few chapters, you'll find some very sensible and useful advice from his extensive study of couples. Some of it seems obvious, some not, but all the content worthwhile to review at some level, probably every 5 years or so. There are even questionnaire/exercises in each chapter.

Some key points (from memory)

Be friends; invest time daily in knowing what/who's bothering or exciting the other; don't necessarily try to "fix" unresolvable conflicts (you don't actually need to have a great marriage); be aware of negative patterns of communication that creep up (the "four horseman" of criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling), be sure to dive deep into past family patterns & narratives; explore all the hard topics (money, kids, caring for parents); and other stuff.

Shady Elyaski says

Please read that book if you are in a relationship! If you really think you are really good at it, you are not! Your relationship might die if you don't work on it. So please make yourself a favor and learn how you can get better.

Lacey Louwagie says

Although part of me thinks I shouldn't read so many books about marriage before I'm married (it can be depressing to sift through all the potential problems that are being addressed in these self-help books), I'm also drawn to them because it's so hard for me to wrap my head around the reality of marriage, and I've always been someone for whom research has provided much reassurance and comfort. So, although I might be putting the cart before the horse, I really like to get things right!

As far as self-help/relationship books go, this is of the caliber that I like best -- based on years of sound research with a proven track record. John Gottman is referenced in nearly every relationship book out there, and with good reason. Within a few minutes, he can predict with 91% accuracy whether a couple will stay married or not, and he uses the results of all his research to clue couples in on the groundwork they need to lay to avoid such a fate (and how to turn things around if the dangerous "warning signs" do pop up). While some of it seems like common sense, some of it is surprising: such as the finding that some VERY common relationship advice (such as the importance of active listening, needing to share common interests, etc.) doesn't actually have the track record to back it up.

I listened to the audio version of this, and it doesn't translate particularly well to audio. There are a lot of exercises and such in it that you're supposed to stop and do, but the whole point of an audio book is that you can listen to it *while* you're busy with other things (dishes, driving, etc.) So I didn't do any of the exercises, and I spaced out during some of them, but when I did listen, it at least gave me some insight into aspects of myself or my relationship that I might not have looked at in such particular terms otherwise. At any rate, if you're looking for research or advice on marriage, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Gottman, and I hope to continue learning from his work.

Lena says

Dr. John Gottman became famous for his work in Seattle's "Love Lab," a research apartment wired with cameras he used to observe how volunteer couples communicated with one another. Through his observations, Gottman discovered patterns of communication that correlate with lasting relationships.

Among Gottman's observations was that the frequency of a couple's fights had less to do with relationship success than other factors including whether or not they had compatible styles of dealing with conflict, whether the partners engaged in certain destructive communication behaviors Gottman labeled "the four horsemen of the apocalypse," and how successful partners were in responding to what he calls breakdown "repair attempts."

It's been a while since I read this book, but I recall it as having a lot of useful, down-to-earth information for improving communication in intimate relationships.

Najla Al-bluwi says

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