

Having a kind of vision, focus, persistence and doing what few are willing to do is what it takes to have a great relationship--of any kind.

The Major Elements of a Satisfactory Marriage

The studies of ordinary workable marriages in middle-class society indicate that many different patterns of marital relations appear to function successfully. There is no one way for two people to relate in order to have a satisfactory marriage, but the following elements appear to be common to the various patterns.

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First, the spouses in a workable marriage respect each other.

Each spouse finds some important quality or ability to respect in the other-being a good parent, making a lot of money, writing beautiful music, or whatever. The greater the number of areas of respect, the more satisfactory is the marriage.

Second, the spouses are tolerant of each other. They see themselves as fallible, vulnerable human beings and can therefore accept each other's shortcomings.

Third, the key ingredient in a successful marriage is the effort of the spouses to make the most of its assets and minimize its liabilities. We have tried to show that if the spouses have enough cultural values in common (and usually they would not have married if they did not think they did) workability depends on learning to communicate in order to negotiate quid pro quo. This allows them to agree on common goals and progress toward these goals. Further, workability requires the recognition that a marital relationship is not static. Relationship is a process involving constant change; and constant change requires the spouses to keep working on their relationship until the day they die.

Somehow, a myth has arisen in this country which teaches that the first few years of marriage form the period during which all problems "get ironed out." The



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implication seems to be that thereafter the spouses sit passively while the marital wagon rolls along through life. This conception of the relationship is nonsense, as we have tried to show. Divorce figures indicate how fallacious this myth really is. Interviews with hundreds of couples clearly show that those who resign themselves to a static relationship are inviting divorce, desertion, or disaster. Disaster comes in many forms in marriage, from psychosomatic and mental illness all the way to the grim life of the Gruesome Twosome.

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Perhaps in the rapidly changing world of the twentieth century the traditional family and marriage structure may become anachronistic. But at present the family unit and monogamous marriages still are the keystones of our culture, and we believe they are worth a lot of effort.