

Stay Happily Married

A resource for married couples.

Creating a happy marriage is possible and this site is dedicated to providing resources to help couples who want to stay together. By providing information about qualified marriage counseling, we hope to encourage couples to get the help they need. The site also features articles, other websites, books, and workshops which offer the tools needed to create happy, lasting marriages.



Assume Love, Not War

This is Episode number 43 of Stay Happily Married, "Assume Love, Not War."

Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at Rosen.com.

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- Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I'm here by telephone with Patty Newbold, author of the blog AssumeLove.com, as well as the website EnjoyBeingMarried.com. Patty, welcome to the show.
- Patty Newbold: Hi, Lee. It's great to be here.
- Lee Rosen: Now, you're on the telephone. Where exactly are you today?
- Patty Newbold: I am in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, an hour north of Philly.
- Lee Rosen: Okay. Chilly up there, I would assume, today?
- Patty Newbold: Definitely.
- Lee Rosen: Yes.
- Patty Newbold: And we're looking at more snow.
- Lee Rosen: Well, it's getting cold here in North Carolina as well. Now, you are an interesting person and I want to dig into that. But I want to give people a little bit of background. You have been married twice and you were inspired as a result of your marriages I think to create this site, AssumeLove.com.

And a lot of people -- when I'm listening to shows like this one thing I like to do while I'm listening -- because I'm often listening as my computer -- is I like to go look at the websites they're talking about. So let me just make sure people know Assume Love is A-s-s-u-m-e L-o-v-e dot com. Type it in; you'll be there. And the other site we may talk about some is EnjoyBeingMarried.com. So if you're browsing while you're listening, rather than driving around in your car, you might want to go ahead and do that.

And so you were inspired to create the site and that was a way of sort of bringing more happiness, fewer psychological issues or problems, and more love to married people, life partners, to their children. And it wasn't something you were doing because you were like a guru or an expert at marriage. Tell me about how you sort of jumped into this and what inspired you.

Patty Newbold: I am a management consultant by day but I'm inspired. I launched this blog on Valentine's Day almost three years ago now to see if I could help more than just the few friends that I'd been helping enjoy their marriages. I think happy marriages are something we all deserve and are just wonderful to preserve.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Patty Newbold: And there's so many great books and therapists out there and they can all help us at getting better at loving each other, but that's really not enough. There's another side to every relationship. There's this real skill to being loved and it's harder to learn and it's harder for the researchers to study because you can't watch other people doing it. So it requires first that we assume love, and that's why the name of the blog.

Lee Rosen: So help me with that. What does that mean, assume love? Give me a little more understanding there.

Patty Newbold: Assume love is something that you can do whenever you get upset by what your husband or your wife does. You know, like when they get angry at you for doing something that you thought was helpful, or when they're spending too much money, or they go cut the kids' hair way too short. "What are you doing?"

And what happens then is that we stop and we assume love. We can fix this. And what I mean there is just assume you're still loved as much as ever by the same wonderful person you fell in love with. And now ask yourself if you know anything at all that might help you explain why such a person might behave the way you're seeing toward a person they love so much.

Lee Rosen: Right. Because so many of us I guess assume the exact opposite; we assume the worst in a lot of those situations.

Patty Newbold: We have to. We have no choice. We have these two little amygdala in our brain and their purpose is to watch the world for signs of danger. And we all have stuff out of our childhood that says there are things that are dangerous to us when people behave in unloving ways, because we were once highly, highly dependent on those who loved us.

And so the amygdala just fires and what happens then is that it shuts down our thinking. I mean, it deliberately narrows our ability to think and it makes us focus on the danger and on what we can do to escape it.

Lee Rosen: So we naturally look at things in the wrong way.

Patty Newbold: Right. It's our natural assumption. It's built into our brains to assume we're in danger.

Lee Rosen: How do you train yourself not to do that?

Patty Newbold: Okay. Well, you just stop -- whenever you realize, "Hey, I'm getting upset. I'm scared about this. I'm angry about it. It's making me feel hurt." And you stop and you say, "All right. Just assume for the moment that what just happened actually happened because a wonderful person still loves me. What else do I know? What else is going on here?" And that stops that flood of chemicals that narrows your thinking and it's when it lets you see things.

Like the one gal I helped who she had just discovered that when she was traveling away from home her husband was watching pay-per-view porn. And that upset her. She'd been married many years and this was not the man she knew and she was freaked out by it. And when she asked him, all he would say is, "The doctor told me to." And that just really freaked her out because now she thought he was a lying, porn-watching stranger in her marriage.

Lee Rosen: Right. You're not just a porn addict; you're a lying porn addict. I love that.

Patty Newbold: Yeah. So we just stopped to -- let's just imagine for a moment he is still exactly the wonderful person you remembered being married to and that he still loves you fiercely and that he's not lying when he says the doctor told him to do this. He's doing something else. What

do you know about what happened? What do you know about when it started?

And she said, "It started in January."

Did anything else happen in January? And she went, "Yes. He got a vasectomy in January." Could this have come out of loving you, that every time you're away and going to come back to the house he's doing something his doctor suggested?

Lee Rosen: So you have to gather data from a different perspective.

Patty Newbold: Yeah.

Lee Rosen: Right. It makes a lot of sense. It would be nice if we could tattoo "assume love" on our spouse's forehead because it's very difficult to remember when they've just done something that's driving you berserk.

Patty Newbold: Yes. And the nice thing is that when you remember these things and you suddenly realize that the thing that you thought was so upsetting actually is a chance to be closer and more intimate to someone you care about, and to say, "I get it. I understand you. I love you. This is wonderful." And your marriage gets richer for it instead of poorer.

Lee Rosen: Now, we talked about you being inspired to build this site based upon your experiences. I know that your first marriage ended in a really unusual and pretty tragic way. Would you mind telling us that story?

Patty Newbold: Of course not. It ended back in 1987, so it's a while back now; and it was shortly after our 13th anniversary and our son's 9th birthday. And the stuff we had to cope with was overwhelming. We had kid problems, health problems, money problems, housing problems, the works. Life was just so stressful and my list of unmet needs grew unbearable. I still loved my husband but I couldn't bear our life together anymore, and I know so many people get there. And I did what a lot of them do. I mean, first I tried talking to the counselors, read the books, etc., and then I asked for a divorce.

And the next day I came home from work and I found him dead from a very unexpected complication of a chronic illness he'd had since he was a teen.

When I woke up on my first day as a widow I ran down that list of unmet needs that I had recited to him in what was almost our last

conversation and I realized that all but one of them was the same or worse now. And the one that was better was so trivial. I could move the glasses now; he'd put them in a terrible place in the kitchen when we'd moved in.

I had full custody. I had all our assets. I had anything I could have ever asked from divorce and nothing was one bit better in my life. And suddenly I got it.

Lee Rosen: Right. Light bulb went off.

Patty Newbold: I got it. Marriage is about loving and being loved. That's all. All the rest, those needs, they're about life and living. You need to deal with them whether you marry or not, whether your spouse can help with them or not. They have nothing to do with marriage and they get in the way of love. When you're open to love, you can get all sorts of help with them but you can't pick what help.

Lee Rosen: So you remarried. How long after your husband passed away did you remarry?

Patty Newbold: Well, I met him 11 years later and we married I think about five years after we met. We're married six years now.

Lee Rosen: So how does your first marriage -- how did that change your second marriage?

Patty Newbold: Oh, my second marriage is a piece of cake. I'm just always in love, I know I'm loved, and it's not because this husband's doing anything different or better. It's because at every moment I am looking for the ways I'm loved.

I tell a lot of people the story about the first time it snowed after we were sharing a house together. And I had lived in a house for many years; he had been an apartment dweller. And it was snowing and it was one of those days where we're going to have to shovel twice because there's just too much to lift it in one pass. So it's like 8:30 in the morning and I'm suiting up to go out there and he's heading in to get a cup of coffee in his bathrobe. And I feel that anger rising in me, that injustice. I know a lot of women whose husbands do everything with the shoveling, but I've been shoveling for many years and I'm going to get out there and I'm going to do my share. But I can't believe my husband's not going to do his share. And harrumph.

And I walked out the door and I said, "Assume love. What else do you know about the situation, Patty?" I know that he hasn't had to

shovel snow. This is the first time he's lived in a house since he was a little kid. He's been in an apartment. Someone else shoveled all the snow; they didn't have to do it. He has no clue what the storm prediction means.

And he may also be a whole lot stronger than me. He may be able to shovel it in one shoveling and he may prefer to wait until the storm is over to do it. Or he may be wrong about what he can do. But all I know is I'm out here and I've got a snow shovel in my hand and I dug it into the snow singing "All You Need is Love." And I would toss the snow, "All you need is love," and I took some more snow and tossed it.

And the oddest thing happened. First one neighbor came over with his snow plow, which he never did again after that, but that day he came over with the snow plow, did part of my walk. The guy who lived behind us came out and started shoveling. And then when I went to the door after I'd gotten the first batch done -- because it's still snowing hard -- and I went to the door, my husband met me -- oh, and my son came out. My son had just arrived from India and I wasn't going to ask him because he was jet-lagged adult and his wife sent him out. So there are all of us out there shoveling.

So I go to the door and my husband is there with a steaming cup of hot cocoa for me. And I thought, "You know, I like this way of shoveling snow much better than the way I had to do in my own home when I lived alone." And because none of us were angry at each other -- I hadn't made him go out in the snow when he wasn't ready to and I had decided not to be angry at him for the fact that I wanted to shovel snow early in the morning -- we were all in a great mood. And my son, his wife, and my husband and I went out and made snow angels and played like little kids and had a great day.

Lee Rosen: Right. A tiny little shift in your perspective changed everything for the rest of your day.

Patty Newbold: Absolutely.

Lee Rosen: Right. And it is. It's an easy shift to make. You just have to have that conversation with yourself.

Patty Newbold: Yeah.

Lee Rosen: But I will tell you, that whole -- you know, I made the joke about the tattoo on the head. It is so hard to remember to have that conversation because that other stuff just kind of grabs you and carries you away in the wrong direction.

Patty Newbold: Well, sometimes you can use something other than a tattoo.

Lee Rosen: Well, I hope so.

Patty Newbold: The reason I use the daisy on my website, a lot of people get it. It's the "he loves me, he loves me not" daisy.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Patty Newbold: And I've decided he loves me. And I carry that mental image of that daisy. I have the daisy in a lot of places in my life to show and to remind me he loves me. There's no question.

Lee Rosen: Right. Now, on your website you talk about a third alternative; that's something that comes up a lot. What are you talking about? What does that mean?

Patty Newbold: Well, Stephen Covey in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* introduced the idea of a third alternative. When we disagree we're each arguing in favor of our own alternative, what will work for us. There's almost always a third alternative that gives us both what we want. And instead, we argue for one or the other, or we insist on a compromise between the two. And I have never gotten why any of us would accept a solution that makes us unhappy only if it makes the person we love most equally unhappy.

So the third alternative says you've got to look for something that meets both of your needs. And in order to do that, you have to talk to each other because, first of all, you don't know what it is that's making your spouse choose the one they're choosing; you're bringing all of your own thoughts to it. And second of all, two brains can think a lot better than one; you just need to generate ideas until you find it and there's so often one.

I was working with someone -- he was in a writing group of mine and I told him this. There's always a third alternative. And he said, "Well, the constant ongoing battle my wife and I have had for 15 years now is about the can opener in the kitchen. She thinks it belongs in one drawer. I think it belongs in the other drawer. She always puts it away in the wrong drawer. It's never there when I want it." And for 15 years they had been sucking the life out of their marriage. Not hugely, not enough to go for a divorce, but just making every day a little more miserable by disagreeing over it.

I said, "How about a third alternative? She wants it in one drawer. You want it in another drawer. Could you give her what she wants?"

Could she have a can opener in her drawer?" And he looked at me. I said, "Without you giving up the can opener in your drawer."

Lee Rosen: Buy another can opener.

Patty Newbold: And he said, "For a \$1.29 we could have solved this problem 15 years ago?" He went out and bought a second can opener.

Lee Rosen: Right. You're exactly right, though, because I'm sitting here thinking, "Well, maybe a different drawer." And we do get locked in --

Patty Newbold: We're stuck. We've got those two and we forget there's a million others. But if you say, "What can we do so I can have what I want and you can have what you want?"

Lee Rosen: Right. Fascinating. So that's the third alternative. Are you able to put that to work in your marriage?

Patty Newbold: All the time. All the time. And in fact I did that -- a big one in my first marriage, actually, right before my husband died, we did actually start using this one back then. We were arguing over where to put our laundry room as we were building our new house. And we had some really funny arguments over it because we always tried to convince each other with what we thought would be convincing to the other one, until the day we decided, "Okay, listen. We know this works at work. Why don't we try it at home? Let's get honest. What is it that you dislike about this location and like about that location?"

As it turned out, I disliked having the laundry room off the family room because I hate the smell of detergent. I have a lot of allergies and it just drives my nose mad. And I thought I would never be able to watch TV while doing the laundry and so that would make laundry-doing even less exciting than it already was. But I never in a million years would have guessed what his objection was.

Lee Rosen: What was it?

Patty Newbold: He said, "I don't want to put it over there because that's the unfinished part of the lower level. And I never want to have to walk through a creepy basement like you have to at your parents' house to do the laundry." He had grown up in a part of the country where the laundry's off the kitchen. And I went, "That's it? The creepy basement is the issue and you wouldn't mind if it's in that location if there weren't a creepy basement between us and it?" He said yeah.

We put up a couple walls and \$50 worth of oak flooring and we had the nicest hallway in the world.

Lee Rosen: Right. So, boom, problem solved. Third alternative.

Patty Newbold: Yep.

Lee Rosen: Exactly. Well, it's funny because your ideas are common sense but they're tough in the midst of the chaos sometimes to remember that daisy or to remember that third alternative. But it makes perfect sense and I think it's just a matter of reminding ourselves over and over again, in whatever way we have to, to go back to those basics because they really work.

Patty Newbold: Yes.

Lee Rosen: Now, you have two websites. Tell me, what's the difference between AssumeLove.com and EnjoyBeingMarried.com?

Patty Newbold: Well, AssumeLove.com is my blog where I write about assuming love, the third alternative, and expecting love instead of all those -- the laundry list of needs we have that we thought had something to do with marriage.

EnjoyBeingMarried.com is a resource directory. It actually has reviews of books and videos that others have written about having a happy marriage. It has my podcast. It has teleclasses; I do free teleclasses twice a month. It has a newsletter you can sign up for that has the marriage tip of the month, things like that. And soon I'll be adding some e-learning there too.

Lee Rosen: That's great. Well, Patty, I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with us today. I feel like I've gotten some very good practical advice. I need to write something on my hand and go home and actually implement these things because you know by the end of the day today I'm going to have a situation, one way or another, where a third alternative would solve the problem or assuming love would solve the problem. I know that's coming in my day. It's just inevitable. And it's going to come every day forever. And if I can just remember those things I think I'm head and shoulders above where a lot of folks are in terms of dealing with these things. So thank you so much for doing that.

Patty Newbold: Well, thank you, Lee. And thank you so much for your website and helping people stay happily married. I think that is just a great, great resource.

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Lee Rosen:

Well, thank you. If you'd like to learn more about Patty and get more information -- it's a constant stream of good stuff coming out of her blog -- the website again is AssumeLove.com. And I will of course put a link to the site in our show notes. And the other site is EnjoyBeingMarried.com where, as you just heard, she's got all kinds of free resources, teleclasses, e-books; you name it, it's there. Great site. Podcasts, whatever you need. Take a look at EnjoyBeingMarried.com.

Thank you so much for listening in today. I hope that you are taking away some ideas that will help you to make your marriage work a little bit better. If you have comments about this show or any of our prior episodes we'd love to hear from you. We really appreciate your feedback and your suggestions and advice. We have a comment line set up at (919) 256-3083. You can leave us a voice mail there or you can e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com.

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married. If you'd like more information, please visit us on the Web at stayhappilymarried.com. We would love to hear your feedback or comments. Please e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com or call us at (919) 256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.