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Don't Let Your New Job Cost You Your Old Spouse

This is Episode number 82 of Stay Happily Married, "Don't Let Your New Job Cost You Your Old Spouse."

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

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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 Dr. Tina Lepage. Tina is the founder of Lepage Associates in Durham, North Carolina, where she specializes in personal and professional relationship issues. She works with children, with adolescents, and does family counseling. She's a licensed psychologist with a doctorate in clinical psychology.

She combines her expertise in and her interest in workplace relationships and issues and mental health, brings those things together, and that's what leads us into this topic of "Don't Let Your New Job Cost You Your Old Spouse." We're really bringing work and family life together.

She's developed and managed successful personal and professional growth programs. She's done that for universities; for corporations; for the U.S. military, who I'm guessing needs some help with emotional issues from time to time. We're really lucky to have her with us again. This is not her first time; I know that you remember her earlier shows and she really does bring a great perspective to the issues that we talk about.

Welcome to the show, Tina.

Tina Lepage:

Hi, Lee. Thanks for having me back.

Lee Rosen: Well, I am so glad to have you. And I remember -- I don't think we've talked about it, but I know that people graduating from school, that that's a big transition and that a lot of relationships -- I mean, I remember when I was in high school and in college, whenever things end -- even the end of the school year, it's like everybody kind of breaks up and starts over with somebody new. Is that what career transitions are like for older folks? Is it the same kind of disruption to your personal life?

Tina Lepage: Well, I think it certainly can be a disruption. And I think a lot of it has to do with -- the type of disruption has to do with whether the couple really wanted the career transition or not, so that can be a big part of it for people.

Lee Rosen: Wow. Yeah. Because today I guess you've got a lot of folks having career transitions they didn't really want to have.

Tina Lepage: Well, exactly. And of course, that's always existed. I mean, four years ago when I did career programs for the military it was helping military personnel transition out. And they might have been in the military for 20 years but they're only 40 and now they're going to go into a completely new job situation.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Tina Lepage: And so it's always been around. I think we're a society where people do transition jobs and don't always stay in the exact same career. And when you're married, that's probably one of the biggest things that can happen is a complete career change. Different than just a job change. Both of them certainly affect the couple.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. And I don't think about it a lot. My wife is a stay-at-home mom, has not worked in many years; and I've had two jobs in my life. So I just have never had to really face this. But I guess there are a lot of things that happen when you talk about career change, job change, like there's lifestyle fallout. What do you see happening when people make those changes?

Tina Lepage: Well, certainly one of the things that tends to happen is that when you go into a new job or new career often times it requires a lot more hours just because you're trying to make a good impression and there's a bigger learning curve in the beginning when you're in a new job or a new career. So you tend to sort of be putting in 120 percent and that takes a lot of hours. So off the bat you can be sort of away from the family more than is typical.

If it's a woman going back into the workforce -- you mentioned that your wife has stayed at home for a number of years. If she's going back into the workforce, particularly when the children are still young and have some childcare needs, then there's all of that to juggle. Sometimes there's a move to a new city; that can be one of the larger disruptions that a couple can have to deal with.

Lee Rosen: Wow. Yeah. I hadn't really thought about all the fallout that -- you know, you make that decision and then everything else may have to change.

How do you see spouses reacting to all of that? I guess if you're the one that's got the job, you're kind of excited about it and you're willing to go and give it that 120 percent. But what do you see happening with the other spouse?

Tina Lepage: Well, it's interesting because there's sort of the assumption there you said that the one spouse wants the job transition. But as we were saying, in this economy that isn't even always true. And so I think the reaction of the spouse has to do with a couple things.

One of the reactions has to do with finances. So is this change in jobs increasing the couple's financial stability and standing or not? Because sometimes when people change careers they actually take a cut in pay and so that certainly has an effect on how a spouse can react to it.

And then the other piece is, was this something that the other spouse really wanted? What is the impact on them? So if it's a move to a new city, have they always wanted to move to that city and they're totally excited? Or are they really upset that they're going to be leaving their friends and family that they have here? So some of it has to do with how they see it affecting them. And that might even be through their spouse. They might say, "Hey, my spouse is excited about that. That means my spouse is going to be happy. That's good. My spouse is happy; makes life good for me." So kind of complex.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. I can see where I'd be happy if we were moving to San Francisco, but maybe not so happy if we were moving to some horrible little town in South Carolina. Not that there's anything wrong with South Carolina.

Tina Lepage: Be careful.

Lee Rosen: Right. The home of that guy that was screaming in the -- who knows. But okay. So all that makes sense. It really does. There's just

a lot of practical considerations that impact your life, like most times. I mean, I understand. Sometimes we're changing careers, especially lately, because we just need a new job. And it might be that there's a cut in pay. But most of the time we want to move up and we're taking the new job for the more money. And maybe this is just provincial thinking on my part -- which wouldn't be the first time -- but shouldn't your spouse be kind of happy if you're making more money?

Tina Lepage: Well, they may be happy about that aspect of it, but being happy about one aspect doesn't automatically mean that you're happy about all aspects. And that may be an area where it's really helpful to be empathetic. So maybe one spouse is, yes, very happy that they're making more money and agreeing that this is a good thing to do, but still -- let's say in the example of a move -- but still they have to move and that's still sad for them. So even though they're happy about it, there can still be some elements that they have to deal with.

You might be excited for your wife if she got back into the workforce in a way that was positive for her, but now all of a sudden you have to juggle childcare more. Well, you're making more money because she's working, but how happy are you about it?

So I think it's not just the money. And particularly if you -- there are people who do change jobs and go down in salary. So you're saying usually it's going up, but I've actually seen a handful of executives who have gotten tired of the grind and decided that they've done enough. They've put away enough money and if they really just cut the way they live in terms of their expenses, they can do something they like better that makes a lot less money. And that has a big impact on their spouse.

Lee Rosen: I guess that's when you find out if your spouse really loves you or not. Honey, I want less stress and therefore I'm going to get less money. See if honey is still around.

Does it take a long time -- how quickly do you see the sort of waves of distress? If there's going to be distress in a family surrounding these kinds of changes, does it take a while or does it happen right when you start the new job?

Tina Lepage: You know, there are some people who will always sort of share their feelings immediately with their spouse.

Lee Rosen: That would be the wives, right?

Tina Lepage: Well, one would think, huh? But not so much around this issue. And so what happens is that the spouse thinks that they're supposed to feel happy about this, and positive, and they don't want to be a downer. One spouse comes home and says, "I have a new job. Isn't this wonderful?" And there's a certain pressure and expectation for that other spouse to be excited for them.

And so we've seen people come in where they maybe have moved to this area two years and been unhappy about it for a couple of years and not really said anything to their spouse.

One thing I will say here while we're talking about this is that I would encourage people to share all of their feelings. It doesn't necessarily have to be that you're being a downer, but just share all of your concerns in a pretty direct way because what we see with the people who don't bring it up for a year or two is they'll come in and say, well, my husband or wife should have known I didn't want to move. I was saying all this stuff about it. I was saying, well, maybe it isn't going to be great for the kids to change schools, or maybe this or maybe that, or it's going to be hard to make new friends.

But when I say them, did you say, "I'm not moving?" Like, "I absolutely do not want to move; this will make me miserable." They always say no. It's that fear of being too direct and too confrontational and so they sort of stuff it all. But then they think they're throwing out these little hints but the spouse isn't quite getting the little hints.

Lee Rosen: Right. Yeah. Hints don't seem to work, unfortunately. Hints would be a lot easier if we could just get people to get it, but they don't. So we'll have to do a whole show on how to do your hints better, maybe.

Okay. So what about schedule conflicts? You've mentioned that a little bit and the childcare issue, which I can see in my life that would immediately -- although, we have teenagers. It's like they have never-ending needs to be driven everywhere. And it's like my 15-year-old, it's like, are we really going to let that kid have a car? I don't know. More of a personal problem.

But seriously, what else do you see with the schedules changing and all of that? And what kind of issues are people dealing with there?

Tina Lepage: Well, I think that sort of you hit it on the head with children. If the couple has children, that's probably the biggest schedule conflict that arises because the new job, whatever different hours it has from the old job or however it changes things, you have to look back

at childcare. And it's all about coverage. Whether your child is 5 or 15, you're trying to figure out who's going to take care of the child or who's going to transport them, etc. And so really it's kind of negotiating that, getting -- if you need outside help at this point or not. Can you renegotiate what you've each been doing within the household? And just sort of getting that coverage.

And I think another thing that can be tricky about new jobs is that sometimes you go in thinking you know what that job is going to look like, how it's going to unfold day to day, and then you get there and it's actually different. And so you maybe even set a plan in advance in terms of coverage for childcare and then you get there and it's different.

So I think for those without kids the conflicts tend to arise more just around the impact on the time together of the couple, whether it takes time away from them as a couple.

Lee Rosen: That's the way it is for people that work here. They think it's going to be fun and easy and then they get here. No, you have to work all the time.

The other thing, just in thinking about it as you talk about it, the thing that I can see that would really be an issue for me if my wife's work and schedule changed a lot would be cooking. I mean, the reality is she spends a big chunk of the early evening dealing with that and I can imagine if she was working that would really throw us off with just how to get dinner -- everybody fed. I mean, practical.

Tina Lepage: Sure. Absolutely. I mean, there are things that -- childcare is sort of the obvious thing, but there are the other things that one spouse might take care of. Dinner, picking up the house, etc. We've seen people who's incomes go down who decide, okay, that's fine; we're going to get rid of the housekeeper. But then all of a sudden who's going to clean the house? And so all of those things have to be renegotiated.

Lee Rosen: Right. I see a lot of folk that have lost jobs in this whole economic recession thing we're dealing with now who are looking for work elsewhere. They have sort of exhausted their options and so they really feel forced to take a job somewhere else and relocate. What sort of fallout do you see in the marriage if that has to happen?

Tina Lepage: Well, again, a lot of it just has to do with whether or not the couple sees this as a joint team thing that they're both excited about or not. And so if this transition to a new career is something that they're

both thinking, okay, even though it came about because of the economic downturn, this is good. There's a new job; there's a new career; this is good place that we're moving to. Then there's not as much fallout.

If that doesn't happen then the fallout that you have is sort of all the practical stuff that we've talked about, but then also the emotional response of the other spouse, which we haven't talked as much about. Relocation can have fallout that goes on for a year or two. People will say if they move to a completely new city where they've never been before that it can take them a good year to transition to that city and to just -- everything is changed. Where do you go to the doctor? Who's your hairdresser? You don't know where you're going when you get there and you have to develop all new friendships. So there's a lot of fallout from a move, and certainly it's easier if both people are excited about it. And even if excited, though, still all of those things can come up.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. It really is like you're just -- you don't know what all the fallout is going to be. Even though maybe you're both excited about it -- it's a move to a great place, great job, all that -- it's like you were saying. It's so hard. You have to make new friends and figure out all those other things. You might find yourself six months or a year later really being unhappy just because it is so hard to make all that adjustment. I mean, I can certainly imagine just having to make new friends. I've lived here forever, so I haven't really been through that whole adapting to a new place. I guess some people are good at that.

Tina Lepage: My husband and I moved here about seven or eight years ago and it was a decision based on a job offer that he had here. And I was on board with that move but I loved it in D.C. I had been there for 12 years. And when we moved down here we didn't have a daughter then and for several weekends I went back to D.C. to hang out with my friends.

And it was probably two or three months later that he said to me at one point, "You know, you do live here now." Because it was close enough to sort of keep going back. And then I had to say, "Oh, yeah. I do live here now." And I really enjoy living here now but it wasn't instantaneous, even though I certainly was a partner in making the decision that we were going to come here.

Lee Rosen: Well, having been through that yourself must make it a little bit easier to help people to manage it and deal with it, I would think.

Tina Lepage: Yeah. You know, moving related to a career or whatever it's related to, we definitely see people that come in with sadness around moving because they have to redevelop everything. And those friendships which may have been developed over years, you can be 45, 50 years old, even 35 years old, and not have had to think about making new friends in a very long time because you've had your set of friends. And they might change a little bit as you meet people here and there or you get introduced to people through your friends, but it's not like just being put out in the desert and here you go; start over. So we do see people that come in who have moved that really need a lot of support around that.

Lee Rosen: Okay. But let's be realistic. So it's stressful to move and it's stressful to have your spouse's hours changed and all of that. But don't people -- like in today's economic climate -- you're the expert. You sit down with them. Can't you kind of bang them on the side of the head and say, "Hey, you're lucky to have a job. Get over it."

Tina Lepage: Well, we don't do it exactly like that --

Lee Rosen: Oh, you have a different approach?

Tina Lepage: -- but we do encourage people who are -- if people are sad about it, we do encourage people to sort of look at the positives. And that definitely helps. And I think in this economic climate, for people when they have a job -- and even if it wasn't this climate, just somebody -- one spouse has a job that they're excited about. And often times we're kind of focusing on the difficulties of it, but often times it's a wonderful thing for both spouses.

And it causes stress just because it's a transition, just like any transition in life. So new house causes stress, getting married/planning a wedding causes stress, having a child. But those are all things that people really want and are looking forward to, so there's also that part of it that this can be incredibly exciting. Your spouse has this job. You guys are making decent money. You're maybe moving, maybe not; and hopefully if you are, that's exciting. And it can be a really great time for people to be in a new career, in a new job.

Lee Rosen: So what is the first step you would take? If you're dealing with a couple like this, what do you suggest to them to do first to kind of -- because they wouldn't be -- they're not listening to this, they don't care about this unless it's causing them some trouble. So what do you first to try to fix this if you're experiencing it?

Tina Lepage: Well, I think the planning and the communication are really key. So if somebody's listening to this who's in the process of just thinking about a career transition or is job searching and so they know that a new job is going to be coming up hopefully soon, then they're in the early stages. And sitting down and talking to their spouse about it and sort of coming up with a plan -- here are some of the pros and cons that might happen with a career change and what are some of the ways that we would deal with some of the difficulties? So talking about it, having a plan, I mean, that seems to just help about everything in life.

If they're already in the thick of it and they're -- let's say the career transition has already happened and they're pretty unhappy at this point, then I think refocusing on the positive. Sitting down and talking about what's going on. What are you unhappy about? How can we fix that? What can we do to sort of meet those needs so that this isn't such a bad thing?

This sort of takes me back in my mind -- I'm going to talk about myself twice now in a think, which is unusual.

Lee Rosen: We want to know. Yeah.

Tina Lepage: Years ago -- I always joke now with the sort of young people that are working with my husband at the EPA -- because he's been there forever. And the young people put in a lot of hours there and it's a very difficult job. And I always joke and say, "Yeah, when we were a young couple I was just totally unsupportive."

I mean, I was so frustrated by all the hours he worked and it was hard to see that long-term vision of this is going to get us somewhere. And I was just focusing on too you've got too many hours at work. Work is more important than the relationship. I don't like this, etc. And he was saying, I have to work this many hours if I want to sort of move up, etc.

And of course, now it's wonderful that he worked those hours. I mean, he did move up. It makes life very comfortable for us. There were all kinds of long-term benefits. But when you're in that moment it's hard to refocus on those long-term benefits, so I think refocusing on the positive but then doing something in the moment too.

Because what we did in the moment was we sat down and we came up with an agreement that he wouldn't work weekends. That worked for me. I figured if I don't see him that much during the week, if he works until 10 p.m., midnight, he can work as long as he

wants. I have friends. I have things to do. I can entertain myself Monday through Friday. So that was our compromise and then that really helped what was going on with us at the time.

Lee Rosen: Right. And you worked it through. I mean, you did what you're supposed to do. You applied your own expertise to your own life. Pretty impressive.

Tina Lepage: Yeah. After I was crabby and unsupportive for a while.

Lee Rosen: Right. Yeah.

Tina Lepage: Then I came around.

Lee Rosen: Okay. So you get the new job and you've had it for a while. And you like it. I mean, it's a good job. You're happy with it. Maybe you're making a little more money and you see the future as being bright. But maybe because of where you moved or maybe because of the hours or something, your spouse is just miserable and the marriage is experiencing the fallout. I mean, it's just not going away. When is enough enough and you're like, "I've got to quit this job? I can't keep doing this because I'm going to lose my marriage over it."

Tina Lepage: Well, I think certainly if you get to that point -- I mean, if you're thinking, "I'm going to lose my marriage over this," then I think that it's time to look at what else you can do and how you can change jobs or careers in a way that would better suit your relationship.

I think there's a lot you do before that point and we've talked about some of that. If you have a new career and one spouse is miserable over it -- and we're kind of assuming that it's the spouse who didn't change careers, but sometimes the spouse who takes the new career is miserable and the other spouse wants them to keep it because it's money or it's stability or whatever.

So whoever's miserable in the mix, if you've really tried to talk it through between the two of you, maybe sought some professional help in terms of counseling, and tried some things -- not just talked about it, but actually tried some things to make the situation better -- if you've done all of those things and you're still living in misery then it's probably time to brainstorm and figure out, okay, what can we do differently careerwise here that's a better match and a better balance for the marriage?

Lee Rosen: Makes sense. Sometimes you've just got to make a shift. That makes absolute sense.

Well, Tina -- we'll have to start calling you Dr. Tina, like Dr. Phil. Does anyone call you Dr. Tina?

Tina Lepage: You know, my last name is so easy that I mostly get Dr. Lepage, although some children will sometimes do the Dr. Tina because with the first name. Other people who work at the practice who have more challenging last names --

Lee Rosen: They go with the Dr. Phil thing?

Tina Lepage: -- they go, yeah, Dr. Nicole, Dr. Katrina. Easier than their last name.

Lee Rosen: Some have accused me of acting like a child so maybe I'll just start calling you Dr. Tina.

Tina Lepage: There you go.

Lee Rosen: Really, I appreciate you joining us today. And you have given us some great information and I do think that if people do what you're suggesting that they can both get a new job and keep their old spouse. So thank you so much.

Tina Lepage: Sure.

Lee Rosen: You should check out the website for Dr. Tina, Dr. Lepage, at LepageAssociates.com. Let me spell that for you because she says it's simple but I think it's a little bit tricky. It's L-e-p-a-g-e Associates.com. And we'll put a link to that in the show notes. There's a lot of good information there about Tina and her staff and the services that they offer, but there's also a lot of articles there and links to other resources. It's a great place to start if you're looking for ideas about how to work on your own marriage. So I would encourage you to check it out.

You can reach Tina at her office at (919) 572-0000. They're in Durham, North Carolina serving the whole Triangle area. So if you live in this area, that would be a terrific place to go if you're looking for this kind of help.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope that you will come back again next week. In the meantime, I'd love to hear from you, hear how we're doing and your suggestions for improvements. We really appreciate all of the feedback that we get from you. We've set up a couple of ways for you to reach us. You can call our comment line at (919) 256-3083 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.