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## Don't Let Your Career Kill Your Marriage

*This is Stay Happily Married #102, "Don't Let Your Career Kill Your 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 Natasha Crawford.

Natasha works extensively with couples on repairing broken relationships. Her previous experience as a teacher also gave her a lot of insight on how problems in the marriage can affect kids outside the home. She's a licensed North Carolina marriage and family therapist and a certified Prepare-Enrich premarital counselor, with a private practice in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Welcome to the show, Natasha.

Natasha Crawford: Thank you so much. I'm glad to be here.

Lee Rosen: Well, I'm excited you can be here too. You know, our topic today is "Don't Let Your Career Kill Your Marriage," and I do think -- I mean, I'm a lawyer and most lawyers I know have been divorced. And I think it is often the career that really just makes it hard to stay married. I think a lot of high pressure careers do that to people. How common is it that people are so wrapped up in their work that they really sort of lose focus on the marriage?

Natasha Crawford: Well, I don't have any numbers. It is quite common and it's very easy for it to happen, especially in our culture of do more, be more, climb to the top at all costs; sometimes the cost is the marriage. People tend to use different things to escape their marriage, be it

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TV, alcohol. And sometimes it's the career because in your career you feel comfortable, you feel confident, and it's just one of those things that it's very easy to get yourself wrapped up into and not focus in on the marriage as much as you're supposed to.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Yeah, it is. And it's unfortunate. Where's that line? Is there really a line between sort of a normal work-home balance and an unhealthy situation? How do you draw that line?

Natasha Crawford: I think it's more of an internal thing. Once you realize that you would rather be at work than at home, when that switch happens, that's when it turns to unhealthy. People get busy all the time. Lawyers have to take the bar exam. Doctors have their rounds. But once you get to that place where you get up early -- even though you don't have to be at the office until 9:00 or 10:00, you're there at 7:00, that's when it's an unhealthy balance.

Lee Rosen: Makes sense. I mean, really what you're saying is, "I'd rather be away from you than with you," which has got to be a big red flag. That's an easy one, I think, to spot. Although I think -- I'm guessing, and you tell me if I'm wrong, but I'm guessing a lot of those people that are going to work early would argue that they have to be there. "Oh, the pressure, the demands. They're letting people go and I've got to make up the gap. I don't want to be the next one to get let go." Do they sort of rationalize that?

Natasha Crawford: Exactly. That's the word that was about to come out of my mouth. There's always a reason. We can explain just about anything. But when it gets to that point where your work is sort of like your mistress, that's where the problem is. And with the economy down the way it is and people are in fear of losing their jobs or getting laid off -- and in a lot of companies that is a reality; it's not an imagined thing. But you still have to balance it somehow. Only the person who is saying it knows whether or not it's a rationalization or the reality of the way things are in the company at that particular time.

Lee Rosen: Right. The old-fashioned kind of mistress sounds like more fun to me than the work kind. I don't know. Let me ask you this. When you're looking at a marriage when one or both of the spouses are really -- they have become just totally career-focused, what does that marriage look like? Are they involved with each other's lives at all?

Natasha Crawford: They're involved in the day-to-day, in the paying of the bills, in the rearing of the children, but not so much intimately. They don't know each other as much as they used to. They're living parallel lives. So they're going down the same track but they're not

connected, they're not touching, there's no connection whatsoever. And this is the extreme that there's no connection or that there's much less connection than there used to be.

Not considering your partner when you make certain decisions in terms of a promotion or taking another job that requires extended travel. All of these things you kind of just say, "Oh, by the way, this is what happened and this is how it's going to affect us and the family," and not really considering that other person and how your decisions for your career advancement is going to affect your partner, your family, and everyone else that's connected with you.

Lee Rosen: It sounds like communication has pretty much broken down in a family like that.

Natasha Crawford: Communication is always taking place; it just depends -- what the question is, is what you're communicating. So even when you're not talking to one another there's communication that's happening. There's the body language. There's the quality or the quantity of the sexual relationship. How you talk about your spouse to other people.

So there's always communication happening; it's just how we're communicating that's changing. The quality of it deteriorates once you get to that place.

Lee Rosen: Right. That makes good sense. It's a good distinction. It feels like it's awfully easy for people to just sort of fall into this career situation where their marriage kind of gets into this rut. I mean, why is it so easy for this to happen?

Natasha Crawford: It's the demands of climbing that corporate ladder, owning a business. It's 24/7. We have our Blackberries that never shut off; that little red light is always blinking at us there's a new e-mail or another text message or something. And we don't shut off these things and you always have to get to the next client or your customer, your supplier, whatever that thing is.

And so it's really easy when everyone around us is telling us your goal should be to get to be VP or CEO or to have your business be a \$1 million to focus on that. And everybody saying, "That's what you should do. That's what you should do." And you look up one day and you're looking around and going, "Okay. What happened to my relationship?"

So sometimes it happens almost by mistake -- or almost by default, I would say is a better phrase. Is your focus on that relationship that

by default you look up and the relationship that you promised till death is no longer?

Lee Rosen: Right. And when you look up and you see that, I'm guessing there are things that these people do commonly. They sort of say to themselves, "Hey, I need to work on this." A, do they feel like they need to work on it? Do they identify the problem? And B, what do they do when they're trying to sort it out on their own?

Natasha Crawford: I think people notice. You notice when the quality of your relationship is different. When couples come in, one of the things that they will say is, "It's not like it used to be." So it's not that it's not noticed, but I think that a lot of the times it's not really knowing what to do.

You're an expert in your field. You know how to be a lawyer. You know how to be a doctor. You know how to be an entrepreneur because you've been doing it for so long and you've climbed the ladder and you're very successful. But where do you learn how to be a husband? Where do you learn how to be a wife? And so when you see that and you're fearful that "I failed at this" --

And when we're talking high-powered people, they're not used to failing big at things. Maybe a small failure here or there, but when you got to that top, failure like that is just -- it shakes you to the core.

So I think sometimes you do nothing because you think, okay, well, having something is better than nothing. You just don't know what to do. But often times people will say, "You know what? We're not where we want to be. We're not where we used to be." And it really just takes that one brave voice to say, "I'm scared for our relationship," and not do it in terms of an attack on the other person of, "You always do this. You never do that. You're always at the office. You're never at home. You treat the business better than you treat me." Because then it will turn into a very vicious cycle where you attack the person and they retreat right back to where you were attacking them for retreating to.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Natasha Crawford: So I think people do try to fix it; it's just sometimes you're just too scared or -- sometimes you're just too scared to try anything.

Lee Rosen: Boy, it's funny listening to you. It's like I'm listening to a fly on the wall in the conversations of a lot of folks, I think. I mean, I'm

guessing a lot of us listening to this are thinking, "Huh. Those are things that have been said at my house."

So I'm curious, if people are smart enough to realize that, "What we're doing is not working and we're not going to fix this easily on our own; we need to get some professional help," and they come in and they see you, what do you do? What is the first thing you do to help a couple out that has really -- the work has taken over the marriage?

Natasha Crawford: Well, the first thing I do before I even see a couple is they get a homework assignment before they even come in the door. I work from a mainly solution-focused model, and so the first thing I ask while I'm talking with them on the phone before I even set the first appointment is, "What is it about your relationship that you want to keep? What is going well? What do you want to maintain?" And so starting from that premise and saying, "Well, it can't be all bad. What are some of the things that you do like?"

I always go from talking about marital expectations. So many couples get married and never talk about what they expect. What do they expect in terms of being a husband, in terms of being a wife? What does that mean? When we grow up we have different visions of what a husband looks like or what a wife looks like and don't share that.

And I always connect it to the career by saying, "You would not take a job and not know what's expected of you. You would not go into the office and not know what your role is." And so many times couples go into a marriage not defining their roles and not defining the expectations that they have of themselves and of one another.

And a lot of times just talking about those expectations and what they want and how to focus on that changes a lot of things. What does your relationship look like, feel like, all of the different aspects? What do you want it to be? And so that's one of the first things I do is talk about expectations and relate it to that career because that's what they know.

Lee Rosen: Right. That makes a lot of sense. And I do think we do come into the marriage with a lot of expectations. We just don't -- I don't even think we realize we were supposed to talk about them. We're just doing the best we can. You guys are the experts.

Let me ask you this. Are you an optimist? When you hear somebody come in and you start to figure out, hey, it's really the career -- the work has really gotten in the way of the marriage, are you pretty

hopeful that you'll be able to patch things up with these folks and help them to get back on the road to happiness? Or does the career really destroy a lot of marriages?

Natasha Crawford: I am absolutely an optimist. I could not do the work that I do without being hopeful of helping couples repair relationships. Just the fact that the call was made and the appointment was kept is huge in terms of saying, "You know what? We really want to work this out." Just those two things alone send huge messages to me that they're really serious about working it out.

Again, it's about those expectations. And once it comes out and they plan for those challenging times in the marriage, as well as in your careers -- it's not always an easy road during your career. Sometimes you're studying for something or you have to buckle down because there's a promotion coming up. And there will be times when it's challenging and teaching them how to plan for those times and weather the storm.

It's just like planning for a hurricane. You know it's coming so you board up the windows and you get ready for it to come so that the least amount of damage is happening. So if you know that the GREs are coming up, or whatever it is that's happening that's going to be a tough time and you can see it down the road, how do we hunker down? How do we plan for it? So that way when we get to the other side we're still intact.

And working with couples from that and teaching them to be open about their feelings and spending quality time with one another. I like to say that your spouse is your most important client. And people understand that. People who are in business for themselves or in a corporate field understand how important it is to have a good relationship with those clients and suppliers, or whatever the case may be. And your spouse is your most important client. That quality time is of the essence. It's what makes that relationship.

And so getting them back to that place where they can put their career and their business in context, put it in its proper place. Sometimes it will take more time from your relationship but not -- it shouldn't be the status quo.

And once they get to that place of being able to say, "This is what I want. This is what I expect out of the relationship. The business has its place." Especially for business owners because it is 24/7; it's their baby. This is the role that the business has in our relationship but it shouldn't be the whole thing. There is no stopping them.

Lee Rosen: Right. I love that. Yeah. Your spouse is your most important client. That is -- and you're right. If that falls apart then a lot of your other client relationships are going to fall apart because your life is falling apart. Yeah. Very good advice.

Let me ask you this. If somebody is smart enough to be listening to this ahead of time, they're not yet -- the career has not yet taken over their lives and they're still doing all right but they don't want to let the career take over. I'm taking a lot of your advice for folks that are already in this situation and I'm applying it to those folks that aren't yet -- they want to do some preventative maintenance. Is there anything else you would say to them from a preventative standpoint?

Natasha Crawford: It's the exact same process but it doesn't take as much work. If you walk into your marriage, or you're already married, and you're both high powered or one of you are climbing the ladder on a business, sitting down and having those conversations about expectations and the role of the career in the marriage are the two most important things.

And being able to actually use some of the tools from career and apply it to your marriage. Things like having an annual or quarterly review, where you just sit down, take an objective look at your goals for your relationship -- because all relationships should have goals, in my opinion.

What were your goals? Was it to buy a house? Was it to move to this next location? To go on vacation more? To be pregnant by a certain time? Look at the goals that you set for your relationship and do the same thing that you would do at work. Have you met the goals? Where are we along in terms of setting the goals? And taking an objective look at yourself. Did I do a good job at being a husband? Have I been a good wife? Did I reach the expectations that I set for myself? So using those same tools that get you to the top of the ladder in business will get you to the top of the ladder in your relationship, so to speak.

I'm a big proponent of mentor couples, of looking for a couple who exhibits the qualities that you want or has been married maybe 10, 15 years longer than you've been married. And you know that they've weathered the same storms that you are currently weathering or about to weather, and get some advice from them. You can find them in your family, in your church, in your community. All of the things that you use to get you to that top can be applied to a marriage. And I think people who are in corporate, it makes more sense to think of it that way. "I do have a mentor at

work and they do help me avoid the pitfalls of --" whatever the case may be, of whatever's happening at the workplace at that time.

Having a mentor couple to help and say, "You know what? We experienced the same thing and this is what's going to help you get to that other side." It works.

Lee Rosen: Great. Yeah. It's good advice and it is language that you really can relate to.

Well, Natasha, I appreciate you being with us today and giving us some great advice. Thank you so much. This is really good stuff and I think we're going to find that a lot of folks were able to put it to work in their lives and in their marriages, so thank you so much.

Natasha Crawford: You're welcome. I'm glad to share it.

Lee Rosen: Well, you can find out more about Natasha and her counseling services for couples and for individuals, as well as her premarital counseling, at her website [NatashaCrawford.com](http://NatashaCrawford.com). I will of course put a link to [NatashaCrawford.com](http://NatashaCrawford.com) in the show notes. The phone number there at her office is (919) 807-1156. She's in Raleigh, North Carolina.

She also has a blog at [NatashaCrawford.blogspot.com](http://NatashaCrawford.blogspot.com). And you can follow her on Twitter; she's @NatashaCrawford. I'll have to do that. I'm a big fan of Twitter.

Thank you so much for listening today. I hope that you will join us again next week. In the meantime, we'd love to hear from you. We really appreciate all the feedback that we get and would love to encourage you to keep in touch. Our comment line is at (919) 256-3083. Also you can e-mail us at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com).

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

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