

Lee: Ten humorous and helpful hints for a happy marriage. This is Stay Happily Married, Episode number 217.

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

I'm Lee Rosen and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. If married life came with an instruction book, would you use it? You know we talk about a lot of specific issues that couples face, everything from treating marriage like a business to learning how to make marriage work when one partner has ADHD. But there are other issues, some of them small, some of them large, that arise on a regular basis that marriage counselors see quite a bit. We often don't consider them issues at all unless they're directly affecting our own marriages. In a lot of cases a lot of little issues add up to become one big problem. If you can identify some of those little things then you can make adjustments in your marriage that will help you to stay happy as a couple.

Dr. Tina Lepage is here today to share ten of the humorous secrets to staying happily married from a marriage counselor's perspective. Tina is the founder of Lepage Associates in Durham, North Carolina, where she specializes in couples and marriage therapy. Tina, welcome back to the show.

Tina: Hi, Lee. Thanks for having me back.

Lee: I'm looking forward to this one. You said that there are ten secrets to staying happily married, and I'd like to run down the list with you and explain each one of these to our listeners. So let's just dive right in. First, I should say that the list is in no particular order, right?

Tina: That's right. There is no particular order, and we should also say that these are supposed to be ten humorous secrets so they're a little bit tongue in cheek and as you know the topic came from me saying to you that these were some things that couples were laughing about in a social gathering. And yet, these are also things that I hear over and over as a marriage therapist. So they're true but there's also sort of a funny element to them as well.

Lee: Good. Good. We can always use a little bit of humor here. So let's go right to the list. Name something off the list that you feel like you hear about quite a bit in your practice.

Tina: Well, we definitely hear more fellatio would make marriages better. That is always on the list. Quite simply, men say that they would like their wives to perform more oral sex, and the gist of the complaint is usually that women did that more prior to marriage. Sometimes, the complaint is that she never did it enough, so presumably more fellatio would make for a happier husband.

Lee: Oh, boy.

Tina: I told you, we're just diving right in here.

Lee: We are diving right in, right. There goes our G rating on iTunes. Let me ask you, are there any more issues in that department before we leave that area of life?

Tina: Right, right. Well, certainly women have their side of that coin, too, so they have their desires and their focus. And wives definitely say that they would be happier if men provided more foreplay. And it's pretty much the same complaint that there was more foreplay prior to marriage, and they would be happier wives if their husbands were providing more foreplay in their sexual lives currently.

Lee: I can't say I haven't heard that one before. Let's get out of the bedroom, but we'll stay in the house. And I think we're getting a sense of where we're going with this. Let me ask you this. One that I've heard, I want to run it by you, is that people say that they should hire a housekeeper to have a happier marriage. Now, I can't help but think having a housekeeper would take a little bit of stress out of the relationship, as long as it's something you can afford financially. The couple would have to spend less time dusting and cleaning and all of those things. And that couple would have more time to do fun things together. What about that one?

Tina: Yeah, definitely. Hiring a housekeeper is definitely on my list. I think so many small arguments and bickering can be avoided if you have a housekeeper. Cleaning is just a job that never ends. So if it's at all affordable having someone else to do it, like you said frees up more time to be spent doing fun things. And with our busy work lives having some time together to have fun is really important. And so it is there. I actually tell friends of mine who are buying a home that they should decide what they can afford by figuring in the cost of a housekeeper. So they should just build that right in from the front into their equation, and they might buy a little bit less house but who cares if they don't have to clean it.

Lee: Right. Very practical advice. I think you've got one there. Now I can just hear the people using this show now as evidence to their spouse for why they, you know, I can only apologize for that.

Tina: Right. Right.

Lee: All right. Let's move on before I get us into too much more trouble. What else is on that list?

Tina: Well, there's a very famous psychologist named Albert Ellis, and one of his bits of advice for a happy marriage is to shut up. He has a very directive approach. He's considered the father of modern psychology, and he had a very direct, practical approach to say the least. And we actually could do a whole show on his approach to marriage, he wrote many books about it. But to this point I saw him speak once, and this is what he was talking about regarding marriage. That marriage would be a lot happier if people

would just shut up. And that you don't have to say everything that pops into your head. I think one example of this might be, I don't know if any other listeners out there would possibly remember this. Maybe, if they're in my age group, but as a child I used to watch reruns of Gilligan's Island. And there's an episode where they eat something that makes it so that they can all read each other's minds. They can hear everything that each other thinks, and within a day they all hate each other.

Lee: Right.

Tina: Right, they can hear things like, oh no, not this boring story again, or I wish this person was a better cook. All of those things that are just probably better kept to yourself. But in marriages people don't always keep things to themselves that are probably better kept to themselves. So that is Albert Ellis's advice is just to shut up. You don't have to say everything that's on your mind. You can actually be reflective and think before you talk and make good choices about what to say.

Lee: Yeah, I can't argue with you on that one. I've certainly found it to be true. I've been married for 22 years, and I think shutting up could be the most powerful tool in my toolbox.

Tina: Worked for you, huh?

Lee: Yeah, it works. You know the other one, for me anyway, that always works other than shutting up is yes dear, yes dear, whatever you say, dear. That one seems to get me a lot of mileage.

Tina: Right. Yes dear, that's excellent. There's actually research on that that shows that if men want to stay happily married, they should become accustomed to saying yes, dear. John Gottman who's probably currently the best known marriage researcher in the U. S. published a study years ago in the Journal of Marriage and Family. The title of the article was, "Want the key to a long marriage, men? Ask your wife, she knows." And the point of that study was that they found that marital success was based not on shared interests or on communication which are the things that people probably thought that the study was going to find that marital success was based on, but that the main predictor of a good marriage was one where men were flexible and confident enough to give into their wives and capable of accepting the influence of their wives without feeling weak to do so. And as part of that study, at the end of it he talked about in terms of turning around negative patterns in marriage and just making the marriage better overall that husbands should remember to respond as often as possible, yes dear. So it's written down in empirical research somewhere out there.

Lee: I'm afraid we're going to put you out of business with all this practical advice, Tina. Everybody's going to...

Tina: That would be great.

Lee: Yeah. Yeah. I guess, not much chance of that. We've made it through five of these and they are fantastic. Five more to go, what's next on the list?

Tina: The next one on the list is, women, your spouse is not your girlfriend and, men, your spouse is not your buddy. And what I mean by that, and this is going to be one of those answers where we just throw around lots of stereotypes, but in general what we mean is for women, your husband doesn't want to shop with you. He doesn't want to see chick flicks, he doesn't want to hear the long version of your story, he doesn't want to analyze the minutia of why something happened the way it did or why it was said the way it was. Those types of things generally make men want to bang their head against the wall. So that is sort of the side of your spouse is not your girlfriend. Go do those things with your girlfriends. That's what your girlfriends are there for.

The side of that for men where your spouse is not your buddy. Your wife is not your male buddy. So the first part of that is realizing you need to treat her nicer than you treat a male friend. I heard a comedienne once describe the difference between men and women this way and how they treat their friends, and why women think men are jerks. And he gave this example of two men sitting together watching television. And he said, okay, they run out of chips and one man says to the other guy, we're out of chips. And the other guy says, well yeah but I went and got the beer. And the other guy says, yeah but I did blah blah blah. And they basically go back and forth until one person loses, and that's the person that has to get up and go get the chips.

Lee: Right.

Tina: Then he says, you know that's the same conversation you have with your wife and she says we're out of chips and you say yeah but I did blah, blah, blah and she looks at you and thinks you're a jerk. Because women don't think that way. He sort of says if you had two women together and one said, we're out of chips. The other one would say, I'll get it, no I'll get it. Oh well, I'll get the soda then, and they'd go off together, and it's a totally different way of thinking. And so the idea is that men when you're with a woman, she is not your buddy, kind of have to be nicer, and also you have to pay more attention to her. So you can't assume that all is well just because you coexist with little interaction. Generally, women want more connection.

Lee: Right. Right.

Tina: Men can coexist with very little interaction.

Lee: That makes a lot of sense. And it's a little more complicated than a few of the other tips I think, but in order to address that, I mean you really do have to sort of adapt your behavior a little bit. But yeah, I mean, it makes perfect sense, and it really is pretty straightforward stuff. Now there's another one here on your list that I want to ask you about. And it says, you say that it's okay to send each other to time out. Now, I've sent my kids to time out, but I really can't imagine putting my wife in time out.

Tina: Right.

Lee: So how do I get away with that so that...

Tina: Without getting in trouble?

Lee: Yeah, I don't want to end up sleeping on the couch.

Tina: Right. Maybe, we have to think that one because maybe you just have to say yes, dear, I don't know. Maybe that's what has to happen. But the reality is that couples will actually joke and say that they wish they could put their partner in time out. And it's not as a punishment but if you think about it time out, even with children like you mentioned, is supposed to be used when things are escalating and you want to pause, bring about some quiet so things can de-escalate. And parents often tell their children to use time out to think about what they've done. So funnily enough, it just makes sense to be able to call a time out which if you're not the one calling it essentially feels like the other person is putting you in time out. But used well, time out does give people time to calm down and think more clearly and hopefully then re-engage in the conversation in a calmer way. And it is so preferable to the spouse who follows their spouse from room to room to room when the spouse is trying to have time out. That's actually really destructive.

Lee: Right. Right. I hear stories about that and that does really seem like a disaster. I like it, I think I could live with that one. What's the next secret on your list? What else you got for us?

Tina: Well, the next secret is just much more basic, and that is no going to the bathroom in front of each other and no passing gas in front of each other. We're back to basics here, the simple things people can understand.

Lee: This is going to be a lot easier for women then for men

Tina: Yes. Well and women are definitely the ones who complain about it more. So, I think you are right. Women are the ones who say they wish this were not so. It's gross, it really reduces the hotness factor of your spouse, let's say. It's a huge turnoff, definitely not the way to get your spouse in the mood. I don't know if people will remember, but Seinfeld actually did an episode on good naked versus bad naked. And some people might recall that, I don't know if you remember that episode.

Lee: It doesn't ring a bell, but now I want to go watch it.

Tina: It's funny so, I think that somebody after sex dropped an earring or whatever and is crawling around on the floor looking for it. And the group all agreed that that's bad naked. Like, good naked is having sex, or naked sunbathing. That's good naked. There's bad naked and going to the bathroom in front of each other is bad naked, nobody wants to see it. And so, yeah, that's definitely on the list. And I would say to women even though

men don't complain about it as much, that's still not a vision of you you want lingering in his subconscious. I just think people should not do it.

Lee: No going to the bathroom or passing gas in front of each other.

Tina: Absolutely not.

Lee: All right. The next one on your list that I wonder about is don't have children. Now that's one that's a rule that gets broken a fair amount. What's the story on that one?

Tina: We've both broken that rule, Lee. I have a child and you have children, so. And I broke the rule knowing all of the research about how children make a happy marriage.

Lee: I have an excuse, I didn't do any research. Right, yeah, what's the story?

Tina: Well, there's just this research has been shown over and over both in U. S. research and research in other countries as well that marriages without children report being happier. That people will report that the least happy time in their marriage was after the birth of their first child and then things get a little better, and it dips again if there's the birth of another child. That they don't really recover back to what they would consider being truly happy until their children move out of the house.

Lee: Right.

Tina: So, it kind of makes sense because it's just not all about yourself anymore and your partner, and you have to then find time for each other, and you've got this other sort of big full-time job in the mix. Plus you've got all the emotionally charged part of making decisions about child rearing, and that has a lot of meaning to it for people. So it probably makes sense that it diminishes happiness in marriage, but it is kind of silly to think about that if you want to stay happily married don't have children.

Lee: Right, but it does make a lot of sense. I don't think that it means that couples who have kids are more likely to divorce necessarily. It just means that couples that don't have kids have the freedom to sort of do things together and be individuals, and they're not as committed to a full-time family life. I mean, yeah, I think it makes a lot of sense. What about, what's number ten on your list? We've made it through nine. I'm excited to hear the last one.

Tina: Right, the last one. So number ten is my favorite one which is have low expectations. So...

Lee: It's number ten. Does it relate to number one?

Tina: Right. Well, I don't know. I like high expectations there. But let's say for everything else. No, this is my favorite one, and this is the one that I'll joke the most about socially which always has my husband sort of rolling his eyes. Because I'll say to people, you

know you can be happily married if you have low expectations. I think that my husband is a much better husband than I ever thought he'd be, so I'm very happily married. And he always says there's probably a compliment in there somewhere, he's not quite sure. But the point is if you have high expectations, sort of the other end of the coin, then all that can happen is your spouse can either meet the expectations or fail. And that's really a bummer because it feels good to both parties when somebody else exceeds expectations. So when you have high expectations, you've left just no room for somebody to exceed your expectations which can feel really great to both parties. So I think just not expecting that marriage is going to be all end all of everything and just being more realistic towards the lower end expectations and that way the person is meeting your expectations most of the time, and oftentimes exceeding your expectations which feels really good.

Lee: Right. No, that's very practical and makes a lot of sense. I absolutely agree with that one. These are ten of the best tips, I think. I mean, they're funny but they're also very on point and practical, and I think they're all things we can put to work in our marriages. Any final words for us today before we let you get back to work?

Tina: Well, probably given this topic we should just say it also helps to have a sense of humor, so that's a great tool in marital happiness is being able to laugh at the quirks of long-term relationships.

Lee: Right. Right. Fantastic. Tina, thank you so much for sharing your advice with us today. I appreciate it.

Tina: Thanks, Lee.

Lee: If you'd like to find out more about Dr. Tina Lepage and her practice in Durham, North Carolina, Lepage Associates, you can visit their website. It's at [Lepageassociates.com](http://Lepageassociates.com). I'll put a link to that in the show notes, but let me spell it for you. It's L-E-P-A-G-E Associates.com. The phone number there is 919-572-0000. Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope you'll join us again next week. For more information about this show and about future episodes, visit us at [StayHappilyMarried.com](http://StayHappilyMarried.com). I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

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