

Scott: Reconnecting with your true self. This is Stay Happily Married episode number 280.

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

Scott: I'm Scott Blair, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Are you and your spouse in tune with your true selves? Our twenties is the time for identifying who we are and what we want to do with the rest of our lives. We go to school to get our degrees and discover career options and maximize our talents and skills, all the while finding that certain someone to start a family and share our future with.

We start to grow older, as a unit, as the years go by. We settle into life long careers while the children take piano lessons and play sports for school, but, what happens when you haven't discovered who you truly were before getting married and starting your family? Eventually, you will have to find yourself, and it can be a messy journey. How do you go about finding yourself? How does not knowing who you truly are affect your loved ones?

Earning her master's degree in Human development and Marriage and Family Therapy, from Auburn University, Mrs. Carmella Whitehead is founder of Whitehead Counseling Services in Charlotte, North Carolina. Mrs. Whitehead has provided individual, couples, and family counseling for eight years. She is particularly skilled in the mind-body therapy, finding self worth and reconnecting to your true self. Mrs. Whitehead is characterized by intuition, compassion, optimism, and collaboration. Welcome to the show, Carmella. I am so glad that you could join us today.

Carmella: Thank you so much for having me.

Scott: Well, I'm not sure if the term "true self" is very well known. Would you mind elaborating on what our true self is exactly?

Carmella: Absolutely, my pleasure. Basically, the way I define true self is an inexplicable essence, more like an inner wisdom, a lot of religions would refer to it as your soul. A very deep understanding within you. Every single one of us has it. It's a connection to something that's bigger than ourselves, whether you want to call that God, the universe, force, french fries, whatever you want to refer to it as. A lot of times, you'll hear people who will say, "This is who I am. I'm being myself". I always like to ask, "Well, who is that? What is that? Yourself?"

So, true self may be a familiar term, however, it isn't really easily defined by many people. Sometimes we think of our true self, as, what I like to call, our everyday self. Some have heard of it as an ego. I will refer to it as an everyday self. If you kind of think about that we have two selves, an everyday self and a true self, then it's easier, I think, to look at that.

The everyday self is really nothing more than an idea. It's an illusion of who we

are, what we think we are. It goes back to, again, an idea. Using everyday self to describe your identity can prevent you from knowing your true self. It's the false idea of believing you are what you have or what you do; kind of a backwards way of assessing your life. It's looking outward in, to define who you are.

Whereas, the true self is more of an inner knowing. The true self is calm. It's clear, consistent, honest, and full of love and peace. That's the best way to describe the true self.

Scott: Just so I can kind of follow along, would it be safe to say that the everyday self is our performance mode, when we're in public?

Carmella: Absolutely. Yes.

Scott: The true self is more who we are behind closed doors, when no one is looking; how we think about ourselves, feel about ourselves, and act, when we have that privacy.

Carmella: You could say that. The true self is really deeper than that, because the everyday self can be judgmental toward our own, about us, and who we are. You should. You need to be this level of, you know, it's your work, the things that, you think, help define who you are. Oh, I'm a banker. What happens when the bottom falls out from the economy, and you lose your job? Technically, you're no longer a banker, if you will. So, how do you define yourself? Any kind of label that we put on ourselves is not necessarily a true statement. It's an illusion, because it's not consistent. It changes. The true self is consistent.

Scott: Interesting.

Carmella: It's very easy to talk about, but wonderfully challenging to access and live through. It is absolutely, 100%, you can live through it. You can work on that and express that this is who I am. Be compassionate toward yourself, loving toward yourself, that sense of grounding. It's deeper. You can express this to the world. You don't have to have the mask, or let it out behind the mask, if that makes sense.

Scott: Sure. What problems do you see couples experiencing in their relationships, when they're unaware of their true self?

Carmella: Again, there's this sense of looking outward to identify and define who we are. There's describing titles, money, your reputation, pleasing others, hoping that they like you, and not pleasing others; I choose to bring anarchy or chaos to the world, and I think that's fun to push people's buttons. That kind of disconnection is a sense of what you could be experiencing, if you're unaware of it. There are people who say, "You know, I always date this person or I always tend to fall into this same situation". Then, that is something that's a reoccurring pattern and a reoccurring behavior that you are participating in. So, there's looping as well. So, it's repeating the behaviors and expecting a different outcome, which, I define as vanity. We all do it. So, recognizing that looping and repetitive behavior and

pattern: I always seem to attract people who take advantage of me. Then, recognizing, well what am I doing that is allowing that person to feel that they can take advantage of me?

Scott: Do you think, in this day and age, it's harder to become aware of your true self because of all the noise? All the information we take in? For me, I consider myself a spiritual person, but it seems like the busier I get and the more I get into the internet and all of these other things that are bombarding my brain, I've been finding it harder over the last few years, to get introspective.

Carmella: That's a wonderful thing to notice. Yes, I think that there are the distractions of the world. I think there have always been distractions in the world. The distractions, it depends on how you define it, you can look at it as a distraction or as a reminder of something to say, "Okay, I have a choice right now. I can either sit down, get on the internet, do social media, I can play a game, or I can sit quietly, go outside and be in the surroundings of nature or go to yoga, pray, or meditate". It's there to remind you that you have choices. It's okay if you feel like, you know, I really like this show. I want to sit down and watch this show, but to recognize, as your watching that show, that that's what you're doing. You're fully participating in that and enjoying that. You're not doing 1500 things at the same time. So, it's recognizing that there is purpose in what you're doing. My purpose is to sit down and watch this show, so that my body can rest and relax, but I know that after the show is over, I'm going to get up and do something else. Taking that time, dedicating yourself, and making a commitment to yourself, and growing yourself, whether it is through yoga, meditation, or prayer. Those are just as important, because that's connecting back to yourself.

Scott: So, the next time I choose to play Candy Crush, rather than pray, I'm going to do it with full intent of being in the moment.

Carmella: Exactly.

Scott: So, left unresolved, someone unaware of their true self, what are some of the short and longer term negative effects that this can have on a relationship, do you think?

Carmella: So, in the short term, life can be confusing. You're looking toward outward things to describe who you are, and they are unstable. They change all the time. One minute you're thinking this and the next minute you're like, "I'm not sure". So, things can be a little confusing. After a while, that starts to wear down on you and you start feeling lost. Depression can kick in. Anger. A lack of purpose; I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing here. Just aimlessly going from one thing to the next. Living in that world of going, going, going, and having a task list. What's on my list, what's next on my list. While you're in the process of finishing one task, you're already thinking about the three tasks ahead and not truly stopping and saying, "In this moment, I'm going to live and breathe". So, a lot of people will just get that sense of disconnect from yourself, a disconnection from the world.

Scott: Well, at what point do you see couples becoming aware that they don't know their true self and it might be hurting their relationship?

Carmella: So, there's this sense of disconnection, I know I talk about that a lot, and there's a lack of commitment to their own personal growth. So, couples are disconnecting from themselves, by not taking responsibility for their own actions and blaming others and trying to change the other person.

So, instead of using the experience to grow spiritually or to grow into the best person they can be, couples are caught in the everyday self of exploding in anger, trying to change each other, disconnecting through disrespect or addiction, work, affairs, things like that. There's just this absence about them and about their relationship. The question of "Is this all there is?" So, each interaction is, actually, a chance for couples to learn about themselves and to use power struggles as a lesson about themselves, personally, and change themselves, personally. It's not about changing the other person. It's about changing yourself.

Scott: You're saying that the true self really can't wear a label. So, we wouldn't expect to see, for example, someone who does this introspection and discovers their true self, that causing a problem. For example, I realize that my true self was supposed to be a banker, that you said earlier, but now I'm married, have kids, I'm 50, and I've let that pass, and that causing a sense of frustration. Nothing like that, because we can't label it. Correct?

Carmella: Correct. Really, it's not a sense of what or who you are, it's just a sense of being. It's an inner knowing. Banking is your passion and you love to help other people through banking. They learn how to budget and invest wisely. This is something you really, really enjoy, and you know when you're in the moment. You know it. You lose track of time.

A lot of times you can sense it around the world. You see things around the world, little things like maybe how people hold their money. You think, that could be a way of their relationship how they define with their money; is it crumpled up in their wallet, is it nicely laid out? Those are the kinds of things that you start to notice. That is your inner self, telling you that this is your purpose. So, your purpose is truly to help. So, in that sense, as you are growing older and in a relationship, perhaps your true self is to say, your job is to love this person and to help this person grow the best that they can. Not to try to change them. So, if this person is going through a difficult time or if they are in a state of anger or disagreement with you, to recognize that there's a lesson here.

This person is my teacher. I think that can be hard for some people, because the everyday self wants to be right. I'm right. What I believe is correct. The true self says all is well, and I'm here to learn. I may or may not follow what this person is teaching me, but there is a lesson here.

Scott: Do you see any patterns or trends among couples that are having issues with identifying their true selves?

Carmella: As far as, like, a particular type of couple or person, no. It knows no boundaries. In the beginning, there can be a sense of frustration or impatience, but it's an indication that you're pushing yourself. There's no one person, type of person, or type of marital dyad that would exhibit this. It stretches across the board, and at any age.

Children are absolutely wonderful teachers, for teaching us how to be our true self, how to access that. They get lost in play. They understand the value of play, but they're also in our world learning about the everyday self. It's coming out. It's something that can happen across the board. A lot of times you'll hear children say things that are very profound. But then they're, especially if they're teenagers, very profound, mature adult things to say, and then the next minute they're doing something that you're just like, "Oh gosh, what is this?"

Scott: I have an 11 year-old, son. I know very well what you're describing.

Carmella: Exactly. So, that's that sense of getting in touch with that true self and, like, wow, yes! You get life on a deeper, more global level. There's something bigger than you here. I think that is everyone, across all ages. If we are able to access our true self, it's not like oh, we're done, our job is done. It's every breath you take, every situation you encounter choice. You can say I'm either going to act towards my true self and what is the love, the peace, the compassion, or I can choose to act away from it. Some people say it's going into fear. Some people call it going into the ego. I call it everyday self.

Scott: What would you suggest to a couple, who's listening to this, that might be struggling with identifying their true self?

Carmella: If the couple is able to stop and to identify any repeating habits, patterns, or behaviors towards themselves... You have to really get real with yourself and be honest with yourself. Sometimes this can be overwhelming, scary, you don't want to do it. You know. You know, I want to lose weight, and I'm going to go in my kitchen and eat pizza and maybe not choose the right food. You know there's a disconnect there.

So, I think there's enough information in the world for us to also learn more about this. It's free. It's free information. I think if you read different types of authors, you'll start to form a sense of what the true self is. So, there's identifying repeating patterns, compassion and loving toward yourself. Once you're able to do that, you can express yourself to other people and then make a meaningful connection. To have purpose. What is intention behind doing this? Those kinds of questions.

Scott: Do you think that one type of person might have an advantage over discovering their true self verses another? I guess I'm picturing, in my mind, I know people that are very scientific and analytical. I think my spiritual friends might have an advantage of drilling down on this topic. Or, I have friends that are introverted, who would rather be alone with a book and a cup of coffee. While other friends don't want to run down the street to the store without taking someone with them,

because they're very extroverted. I think the introvert would have an advantage over discovering that. Is that true or not true, do you think?

Carmella:

I don't believe that. I think that we all can find our true self in our own way. It's like speaking your own private language. The extrovert can find his true self in other people, and in helping other people and in service. Running down to get coffee, because you're my friend, and I want to connect to you. The introvert, I would rather connect to myself in this language. Again, if we use the analogy of language...I, myself, am an introvert. I may look at an extrovert and say, "Oh my gosh, how in the world can you connect to yourself when you're out here doing all of this". It's just a different language. So, to recognize, maybe this person is teaching me something about myself that I admire their way of connecting to their true self, but because I now know how I can connect to my true self.

The extrovert, I can say go outside, take time for yourself, and that's absolutely true. But, maybe taking time for yourself is going on a walk with your partner, and you just walk in silence, but you still have that partner with you. Or, maybe it's talking to that partner and saying, "I really had a frustrating day, and, instead of yelling at my co-worker, I decided to ask my co-worker to just sit and listen to me". So, those kind of things are working through and discovering who you truly are.

Scott:

Great answer. Half of my friends hope I had written them off, and you defended them

Let's continue on that thought. I like where you were going. So what are some specific items are couples working on that would help resolve some of those negatives that you listed earlier?

Carmella:

So, basically, identifying the pattern and common theme that leads to conflict. Conflict does not need to be screaming and yelling at somebody. It can be the silent treatment. It could be avoidance. Anything that is of discord. It can also connect itself in a compassionate, loving manner. That is compassion and love to yourself. Instead of I'm so stupid, why did I do that...that kind of language is tearing you down. You've learned that from somewhere. Ask yourself, whose voice is that really in my head? Who is really saying that? Where did I learn that? Did I learn it in school? Did I learn it from a parent?

Those are kind of deep questions that you really have to sit and contemplate. Also, redefining and re-framing the conflict as a lesson. Everything in life is a lesson. I do not believe in mistakes. I believe that everything is a lesson. To teach you something about yourself or someone else, and, also learning it through self love. So, going back to what I just said, "Oh, I made a mistake. It's okay", or "I've learned this lesson. How can I grow from here?". The most important part is learning the life lesson through meaningful connections, gratitude, and service to others. Absolutely, 100%, service to others.

You know the saying, "My cup runneth over". Well, when your cup is running over, but it's not full, you're going to get yourself tired. You really have to

dedicate time to yourself. It's not selfish. It's self preservation. Then, your cup can be full, and whatever runs over is for other people.

Scott: So, when couples are able to identify their true self, what are some of the changes you're noticing or seeing in the quality of interactions in their relationship?

Carmella: I love this question. So, basically, there are three big things. One is a connection and learning. I've combined the two. So, there's a deep connection and compassion to self, and, once you have that for yourself, you can really start to express it to your partner. So, couples who use conflict as a means for learning, so defining who's right and who's wrong, they recognize that you are here to help me learn, and I am also here to help you learn. It's a two-way street.

So, with that comes the trust. It's a sense of we're in this together. I know we may have an argument, and that's okay, because we're still in this together. So, they approach a difficult situation in a strong, almost unbreakable entity, if you will.

Then, love. Love is at the core of everything. Love may have been there, but true love, a true sense of respect for oneself and then applying the same respect to your partner, is key. Looking at your partner and saying, "This is my best friend. How do I want to talk to my best friend?" Talk to yourself the same way that you want to talk to your best friend.

Scott: Carmella, this has been very interesting and very challenging. Is there anything else that, you think, our listeners should know?

Carmella: I think just that everyone is here for a purpose, and we're here for a reason. It's your job to figure out what that is. You can do that through connecting to your true self. Everyone, absolutely everyone, has the ability to do it right now.

Scott: Carmella, thank you so much for talking with us and being on the show today.

Carmella: Thank you so much for having me. It was my pleasure.

Scott: To find out more about Mrs. Carmella Whitehead and her practice, Whitehead Counseling Services, you can visit their website at www.CarmellaWhiteheadMFT.com or call 646-530-0993 for an appointment.

Thank you so much for joining us today, and I hope you'll join us again next week. For more information about this show and previous episodes, visit us at Stayhappilymarried.com. I'm Scott Blair. Until next time, stay happily married.

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