

A 25th Anniversary Ceremony

Man:

When we thought about how we wanted to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary, we got this sense that we wanted to have it be a little more formal than the way people typically do it. We decided we wanted to do some intimate sharing about our journey, in the hope that we might throw out a few pearls of wisdom that will help others to make it to the twenty five year mark.

Woman:

We certainly do not see ourselves as any kind of relationship gurus. But we do of course feel a deep sense of pride that we have been able to nurture and sustain a loving partnership for twenty-five years. We've made plenty of mistakes. But we've reached some insights too, about how to get through the many land mines that can destroy a relationship. We have seen many a well intentioned couple fall by the wayside and we know, in all honesty, it could have been us. Sustaining a successful, vibrant is very difficult. In my opinion it is worth the work, but it is not for the faint at heart!

Man:

So we would like to share a little about our journey in the hope that it might help all of you in yours.

Woman:

Perhaps the first question that comes to mind whenever people debate about why some couples succeed and some couples fail in creating a long-term relationship is how much of it is in the picking and how much of it is in the doing? I can't narrow it down to specific percentages but I do think that some part of our success had to do with the choosing. I certainly did not randomly pick Mike out of the bowl of available men. I did a lot of thinking about what I was looking for in a husband and tried to prioritize which qualities were most important. I endured some alone times in order to hold out for someone that felt really right. The qualities I held out for and found in Mike were a kind heart, intellectual chemistry that caused us to never seem to run out of things to talk about, and a strong compassion about the welfare of humanity. I also felt a strong physical passion. There were a lot of nitty-gritty details of our shared life to be hashed out, and that was not always easy. But finding the qualities that I decided were most important created a strong base to work from.

Man:

I likewise looked around a bit before picking a wife and did some serious contemplating about what was important to me. What attracted me most to Andrea was her bubbly, upbeat energy; she just emanates this joy about being alive. She also was very self-disciplined and goal driven which was a good match for me because I wake up with a things-to-do list tumbling out of my brain within my first waking moments. I think a real mellow, go-with-the-flow kind of person would have driven me nuts and vice versa. Another compatibility was we were both pretty much homebodies. We both liked working around our house and yard and cooking gourmet dinners together. Neither of us had much of a traveling bug or desire to paint the town very often. I likewise felt a strong physical attraction to Andrea the first time I met her which has never waned. As Andrea said, there were also plenty of incompatibilities to bash heads over through the years, but we had such a strong connection that it motivated us to want to work things out.

Woman:

So that's the choice part. Then there is the relationship skills and attitude part of it all. I think the most important thing is always being able to keep the big picture, long term perspective. You can be really angry in the here and now, and hugely disappointed, or just plain sad that the other person isn't giving you what you want. But you always have to ask yourself "How important is

this lack, or frustration, in the bigger scheme of things? And if I leave this person, how many bad qualities or incompatibilities will I find with his/her replacement?" So you learn to work around the lacks, and through the frustrations. And each time you do that, you hone your compromising skills, so finding workable solutions is easier the next time.

Man:

I agree with all of that. I would also add that sometimes you discover that what you perceive to be a lack in the relationship, for example, that you start to feel bored or depressed, really turns out to be because of issues inside yourself – it's not really about what is going on with you and your partner per se. Take for instance mid-life crises. That is a real thing. And it is so, so easy to blame your partner for the fact that you feel like crap and like your life didn't turn out like you wanted or expected. And it is so easy, as far too many people do, to get sucked into the trap of having an affair, believing that this new person will breath new life into you; help you discover that joy that you seem to have lost along the way. But really those feelings that happen during mid-life crises, or at any rough period in your life, will follow you into your next relationship. They are really about coming to grips with your own demons and making peace with yourself. And when you do that, and it is some serious work, lo and behold, you find yourself back in love with your partner. Maybe in a different way, but in love again. Not to say there are not sometimes legitimate reasons for divorce, but I've seen some divorces that I think were unnecessary. I am so very glad that we did not end up as one of those couples. It can happen to anybody. Maintaining a happy, vibrant marriage is not easy.

Woman:

I can drink to that. I don't think you will find many couples who have been together for any significant length of time who will tell you that it is easy. Marriage has ebbs and flows. If you freak out over the ebbs you won't make it long term-- plain and simple. A few bad years out of several decades are worth enduring. It is also inevitable that you grow to resent certain things about your partner and wish that he/she was different. Maybe you wish he/she shared a hobby that is so important to you. But is it really worth breaking up a marriage over? Perhaps you can find a friend to share that hobby with you. Or maybe you see your partner making what you think are bad decisions about certain areas of his/her life; money, health, he's neglecting his dog horribly, whatever. You tell him but he doesn't see it. This is where patience comes in. You sometimes just have to stand back, shut up and let him figure it out himself. Constant nagging just creates bad energy. Marriage requires a "Let him who has not sinned cast the first stone" perspective.

Man:

You also have to be able to forgive one another. Loving somebody hurts sometimes. Marriage creates an incredible vulnerability and sometimes you really hurt one another and let one another down. When that happens the guilty party needs to buck up and step forward with an heartfelt apology and a promise to do better in the future, And the other person has to accept the apology without a whole lot of guilt tripping and you both need to be able to move on from it, let it go, and not hold a grudge.

Man:

We would like to end with some vows we would like to make to one another as we go forward to hopefully another twenty five years!

Woman:

There seems to be a new trend of older couples renewing their marriage vows at their anniversary celebration. We actually don't like to think of it in those terms. Rather we would like to exchange some new vows that speak to our needs and goals for this stage of our lives. Please witness as we recite the vows we have written.

Man:

I will start off with some humor. I promise to not try to use the Golden Rule with you, no "Do unto others as your would have them do unto you." The spirit of that old rule is wonderful, but when it comes to marital

partners it is actually a bad idea. John Woods has reached amazing popularity with his Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus books in which he vehemently argues do not treat your spouse like you want to be treated because men and women want to be treated very differently. So the vow I want to make to you Andrea is “I pledge to treat you the way you have taught me over the years that you like to be treated. Not how I want to be treated.”

Woman:

I hear you. I likewise learned that to treat you the way I think I would like to be treated is often a recipe for disaster. Rather to be a good spouse, I need to constantly observe and listen to what you communicate to me as to how you want to be treated.

Man:

Ah, the magic word—“listen”. From years of experience, I know one of the most important pledges I can make to you is: “I pledge to truly listen to what you are saying and try to the best of my ability to understand the meaning, intent and importance.”

Woman:

I also pledge to truly listen to you. I will share with all of you that Mike and I actually went to marital counseling for awhile because we were having some communication problems. I mean, we didn’t have trouble talking to one another, we were never one of those couples who needed to increase the volume of their talking. But we did have some trouble listening and comprehending and that sometimes led to some real hurt feelings and frustrations. We went to something called Imago therapy. Imago means “I see you”. We engaged in listening exercises where one of us would say something to the other and the listener had to say “I hear you saying ... did I get it right?.” And if the other person said “We’ll you got part of it right but actually you missed this part of it”, we had to keep working at it until both talker and listener were 100% satisfied. I think that training saved our marriage.

Man:

Another thing I would like to pledge is to express appreciation for your efforts and for changes you make on my behalf. I’ve seen married couples who seem to always focus on what their partner is not doing for the relationship rather than what they are doing.

Woman:

I return that pledge. Some people also seem unable to notice or acknowledge improvement in one another. I promise to thank you for your baby steps because that is how growth and change happens.

Man:

I also pledge to “agree to disagree” on those subjects which really don’t matter in the bigger scheme of things. After living with you for twenty-five years, I know you are always going to want to spend more money fixing up the house than I would if this were my bachelor pad. I can

always think of ten other things I’d rather spend that money on, but I have come to know that is just something I have to compromise on.

Woman:

I appreciate your concession on that. In return, I hereby pledge to let you block out big chunks of weekend time for watching sports without bitching about how dumb football is, and that there are so many other healthy hobbies you could do instead. You are a football loving guy and I love you in spite of it. Once in awhile I even am willing to make some meatballs and chicken wings for you and your friends. I do expect wife brownie points of course to be cashed in later.

Man:

Well okay we are done with the ‘heavy’ part of this shindig. Let’s get some food and tear up the dance floor!!!

Woman:

Thanks again for being here today.