

***The Divorce Remedy:  
The Proven Seven-Step - Program for Saving Your Marriage***

Chapter one- The Not -So-Great Escape

People who are unhappy in their marriages often speak of feeling trapped. They yearn to be free from the tension, loneliness, constant arguments or deafening silence but worry that divorce may not be the right decision. After all, they took their marital vows seriously. They don't want to hurt their spouses. They don't want to hurt their children. They panic at the thought of being alone. They worry about finances. They fear the unknown.

Yet, the idea of living in a loveless marriage starts to feel like a death sentence. They feel caught between a rock and a hard place...trapped in a life of misery. Over time, many of these people slowly convince themselves that the benefits of leaving their marriages vastly outweigh the benefits of staying. They tell themselves, "Kids are resilient, they'll bounce back," or "In the long run, this will be better for everyone," or "Sure, it will be hard for a while, but change is good for people, or "Anything has got to be better than this." It's not until they embark on the path to divorce and begin to piece their lives back together that they discover the real price they paid for their so-called "freedom". Regretfully, this painful discovery comes too late. They have fallen into the divorce trap.

*The following are two letters from people who stumbled into the divorce trap:*

**Dear Michele,**

I have been searching the internet for the last two weeks looking for help or information about my problem. I was married for 18 years and we have three terrific children. I instigated a divorce. It was final six months ago. Now, I am having second thoughts. I miss my "family" so much. And, of all things, I really miss my husband, ex, that is. If I could just talk him into it, we might be able to work on our relationship and make our family whole again.

I never imagined that I would feel this way because, for years, I was so miserable in my marriage. I thought that once I got out, we all would be better off. My ex and I would stop fighting, and we would all be free from the stress and tension in our home. At first, it was a relief to get away from all the arguing. However, I could not anticipate how quickly the feelings of relief would turn to pain. The look on my children's faces when they talk to their dad on the phone or when they come back from weekend visits has been more than I can bear. I knew they would be sad, but I had no idea how deeply this would affect them.

What surprises me the most though, is the fact that I find myself thinking about my ex all the time. He is far from perfect, but I now realize I could have made more of an effort to learn how to deal with the things that irritated or hurt me. Instead, I just shut down and shut him out. Now I am haunted by the fact that my divorce destroyed not only a marriage, but a family. I am desperate to know whether there are others out there who regretted their decision to divorce and somehow managed to make their families whole again. I pray to God that the answer to this question is "Yes." Can you help me? Joan

**Dear Michele,**

I feel like a fool writing to you, but I don't know where else to turn. After 24 years of marriage, I told my wife I wanted a divorce. I had been pretty unhappy in our marriage for a long time. Our sex drives were totally incompatible. Whenever I approached her, she never seemed to be in the mood. At first I thought I was doing something wrong, but after a while I got sick of all of her excuses. I felt angry all the time. Plus, she constantly nagged about everything. I'm a hard worker and a good provider for my family, but nothing I did pleased her. I dreaded coming home at night.

Then my life changed. I met a younger woman at work who respected me and seemed attracted to me. Although I never thought I would be the kind of guy who would have an affair, after spending hours together working on late night projects, the temptation just became too great. This really threw me because, for the first time in a very long time, I felt alive. She was really fun to be with and she couldn't keep her hands off me! What a difference from my wife! Well, that really turned my world upside down. I started paying more attention to body - working out more, eating better and caring about my appearance. Although my wife suspected something, I kept my affair secret.

Eventually, I realized I couldn't live this lie any longer, so I filed for divorce. My wife was devastated. She begged me to stay. She tried to explain away my feelings - insisting that I was in the midst of a midlife crisis or that I was depressed and not thinking clearly. I thought she was nuts and couldn't wait to get out on my own. I knew the kids would survive and I believed our marriage had died long ago.

The divorce became final a year ago during which time I have made some painful discoveries. As trite as it sounds, the grass really isn't greener on the other side. It didn't take long before I lost my infatuation with the other woman. She was sexy but extremely immature. Besides sex, we had nothing in common. I started hating her messy habits and loud music. We had no history together. We didn't bring children into the world. I started missing my wife.

But the sad ending to this story is that my wife has moved and wants nothing more to do with me. If I had approached her six or eight months ago, she might have been receptive to giving our marriage another try. But the damage was done. She has made a whole new life for herself and I am not part of it. And even though I never told the kids about my affair, they seem to be angry with me and busy themselves with plans whenever I try to spend time with them. This hurts more than they will ever know. So, I'm not even sure why I'm writing. I doubt you have anything to say that will help in my situation. But if you have any suggestions, I will be forever grateful. Mark

Mark and Joan are not alone. The divorce trap seduces over one million people each year. It promises peace and tranquility. It offers a fresh start, a second chance at romance, contentment, and self-discovery. It lures people into its grip by offering assurances that walking out the door can eliminate life's seemingly insurmountable problems. When you're desperately unhappy, these so-called guarantees are hard to resist. But there are good reasons for doing so. If you or someone you love is contemplating divorce you will want to know what I have learned about the truth about divorce.

In my work, I've had a bird's eye view of what happens in people's lives after divorce. I have seen the intense pain and despair that lingers for years. I have seen times when every birthday, holiday, or other causes for celebration have been nothing more but painful reminders of a divorce. I have seen the triggering of unpredictable, hurtful events such as the total rejection by the children of the parent seeking the divorce. I have known children who, even after many years following the divorce and after their parents' subsequent marriages, still want to know if mom and dad will ever get back together.

Now, after three decades of our social experiment with rampant divorce and disposal marriages, I know it isn't a matter of people keeping their marriages together because they can, it's a matter of people making their marriages work because they should. Divorce stinks! Why? Recent findings about the long-term effects of divorce speak for themselves.

\* Except in very extreme conflict-ridden families - and most families do not fit this criterion- children are better off when their parents stay married.

\* Children are more likely to finish school and avoid problems such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and delinquent behavior. Plus, they are more likely to have good marriages themselves.

\* Even if a parent is happier as a result of divorce, there is no "trickle down effect." Children still struggle emotionally regardless of how the parent feels.

\* Married men make better fathers. They are more likely to provide guidance, role modeling, and financial support.

\* Marriage is good for most adults. As compared to single, widowed or divorced people, married people are healthier, have better sex lives, they engage in fewer high-risk activities such as substance abuse, they live longer and they are happier!

\* Depression is almost three times as prevalent in women who divorce once, and four times as prevalent in women who divorce twice than in women who have never divorced.

\* A random sample of over 8,600 adults revealed the percentages of those who felt lonely. The results are as follows. Marital status and % reporting loneliness:

Married- 4.6

Never Married- 14.5

Divorced 20.4

Widowed- 20.6

Separated- 29.6 (Page and Cole)

\* Those in healthy marriages tend to be better, more productive employees. Married men miss work less often.

\* Divorce increases the cost of many public health and social service programs. Single-parent households often mean children are raised in poverty or on public aid.

\* A single mother's standard of living almost always decreases significantly after divorce.

\* As compared to 50% of first marriages that end in divorce, 60% of second marriages end in divorce.

Many people considering divorce say they wish they could have a crystal ball that would allow them to see into the future. Actually, the crystal ball is here for the taking. Research has enabled us to be "clairvoyant."

But many people choose to ignore or discount the facts because they've been hoodwinked into believing that divorce provides answers to an unhappy marriage. But how are myths about divorce being perpetuated?

The divorce trap is a powerful conspiracy that is invisible to the naked eye. Like carbon dioxide, the odorless killer, the divorce trap is an insidious influence, invading your thoughts without your knowing it. What are the forces behind the divorce trap.

Well-meaning friends and family

Oddly enough, some of the people nearest and dearest to you are part of the problem. This is not to say that they don't have your best interest at heart. They do. They love you. They can't stand to see you in pain. More than anyone, they know you and know how much you deserve happiness in your life. Their caring is genuine. Why then, do I say that your loved ones can be misdirecting you?

### **The Biased Shoulder**

When you share your unhappiness with loved ones, what they hear is your side of the story, and your side only. Even though your feelings about your spouse and marriage are valid, they are, nonetheless, biased. Needless to say, if your spouse were in on the conversation, the story about your marriage would take a not-so-slight different turn. But the people who love you don't care about objectivity; they want you to feel better. Although this makes perfect sense, the end result is that the people in whom you are confiding, offer potentially life-changing advice without a complete set of facts. If you follow that advice, you may create an even bigger rift in your marriage. Let me give you an example of how this works.

Sue was miserable in her marriage. She felt that she and her husband, Jeff, had completely grown apart. Sue decided to talk to her sister, Ann, about her situation. Sue told Ann that she was really upset about how things had changed in her marriage. When she and Jeff got married, she explained, they were crazy about each other. They did everything together, spent hours talking, weekends doing fun things, and sex was great. They were best friends. As Sue recalled these memories, she cried. Ann's heart went out to Sue to see her in such pain. Ann asked Sue to tell her more about what had been troubling her. Through her tears, Sue filled in the blanks.

She said that Jeff had turned into a completely different man from the one she married. He worked a great deal and when he was home, he showed little interest in talking or being with her. On weekends, he occupied himself with projects or watching sports on television. When Sue approached Jeff about her feelings, Jeff responded coldly, "Why are you always hassling me?" Sue tried to get through to Jeff and tell him how much his distance was hurting her, but Jeff seemed to withdraw even more.

Jeff's insensitivity to her feelings made Sue angry and hurt. She stopped cooking for him, doing his laundry, trying to engage him in conversation and even refused his advances to be intimate. In short, things went from bad to worse. Now, instead of just being distant, Jeff had become critical and unpleasant, never passing up an opportunity to say or do something to hurt Sue's feelings. Sue couldn't understand why Jeff had become such a "jerk," especially since all she wanted was a closer relationship.

Upon hearing Sue's rendition of their marital interactions, Ann immediately came to her defense. "I can't believe he's acting this way! This isn't the same Jeff I used to know. What do you think is going on with him?" For the next half-hour, they hypothesized the possible causes of Jeff's ugly behavior- an affair, depression, a mid-life crisis or perhaps just bad genes from his father. Although they were uncertain as to the real reason Jeff had transformed into the unlikable man Sue had portrayed him to be, there was a consensus that Jeff was to blame for Sue's unhappiness. Ann consoled Sue. She hugged her and told her that she "would be there for her anytime she was needed". Ann also offered a few suggestions- counseling, giving Jeff an ultimatum, a trial separation- and Sue said she would consider her ideas. Sue thanked Ann for her support and understanding. She felt so much better.

Sue did follow through with Ann's suggestion to give Jeff an ultimatum. "Either you change, or I'm leaving," she warned him. But Jeff did not change. Her threat angered him and he became even colder. In the weeks that followed, Sue regularly sought comfort in Ann's friendship. Sue complained, Ann commiserated. Although Sue felt validated by Ann's feedback, it did little in the way of helping her find solutions to her marital problems. As time passed and nothing improved, Sue's despair grew, as did Ann's determination to encourage her sister to leave her marriage. "You've tried everything," Ann told her, "It's time to throw in the towel."

From Sue's one-sided story, it's easy to see how Ann arrived at this conclusion. Sue appears to be the spouse who is working on the marriage while Jeff is the inconsiderate, unloving spouse. From Sue's story, one could easily get the impression that she has been wronged for years by Jeff's selfishness. But before you jump to conclusions, let me allow you to eavesdrop on Jeff's conversations with his lifelong buddy, John. Jeff is a very private person and, though he rarely opens up with friends and family, his unhappiness with Sue prompted him to discuss his marriage with John.

He told John that he was frustrated and angry at Sue. All she ever did was nag and nag and nag. Nothing he did ever seemed good enough. She asked for help in the kitchen and when he cleaned it, the only comment he heard was, "I can't believe the way you loaded the dishwasher, it's so sloppy," or "You forgot to wipe off the counters." All Jeff heard was criticism, never appreciation. So, after a while he just stopped trying.

A married man himself, John knew that their relationship problems didn't happen overnight, so he asked about the circumstances leading up to their current situation. Jeff was unclear as to the causes of their problems, but he felt that Sue had bailed out on him as a partner long ago. "When we met, she was fun to be with. We went to sporting events, out to dinner, we socialized with friends, and had common interests. We golfed, played tennis, and biked all the time. We both loved the outdoors." But Sue stopped showing interest in their activities together. She seemed more interested in her job, church activities, friends, talking on the phone and going shopping. Sometimes she would stay on the phone with her girlfriends or her mother the entire evening! "But the biggest change in Sue," Jeff said, "is that she never wants to have sex, and it's been that way for a very long time. That definitely bothers me the most."

Jeff went on to explain how hurt and angry he felt because of Sue's constant rejection. "I don't know what's with her. She used to love sex. We had a great sexual relationship. I always prided myself about how connected we were physically. But now she's never in the mood. She's got a headache, she's mad at me, she's too busy, it's the wrong time of month... It got to the point where there never seemed to be the right time." He told John that Sue's cold shoulder had taken its toll; he felt a low-grade anger whenever he was in her presence. He admitted to being irritable lately and snapping at Sue fairly often. He was hoping that at some point Sue, the woman who used to be his best friend and lover, would, just once, reach out to him and be affectionate. Instead, all he ever got was criticism.

After hearing Jeff's dilemma, John said, "Sounds really tough. Sue used to be so good to you. I wonder what's up with her. Maybe her hormones are running amuck. I heard about some women with hormone imbalances losing interest in sex. You ought to check it out. Sorry to hear you're having problems." Then he suggested that Jeff do something to spice his sex life up a bit. "Get a bottle of wine, buy a sexy nightgown and make her a candlelight dinner. Stay at a nice hotel next weekend. Tell her you want to be closer physically."

A few days later, Jeff approached Sue with the idea of a little romantic weekend getaway. Sue didn't seem too interested. Jeff made a comment about not being intimate anymore and Sue bit his head off. "Of course we're not intimate! You don't expect me to want to have sex with you when our relationship stinks, do you?" Jeff replied, "Have you ever thought about the fact that our relationship stinks because you don't want to have sex any more?" This chicken-or-egg argument played like a broken record for weeks before the couple decided to split.

Imagine how Ann or John might have reacted differently had they heard "the whole story". Instead of thinking Jeff was a jerk, Ann might have had more compassion. She might have realized that Jeff wasn't the villain Sue made him out to be; that he was feeling rejected and hurt. With this in mind, Ann might have suggested that Sue do things that would help Jeff feel more connected to her such as go biking or hiking together, or being more playful and affectionate. There's no question that Jeff wasn't handling his hurt feelings in the best way, but unfortunately, that often happens in relationships. Instead of sharing openly about feelings of vulnerability, some people lash out. When relationships are working properly, partners are often able to see beyond the anger and address the hurt beneath it. Since Ann was totally in the dark about Jeff's feelings about the marriage, her suggestion- give him an ultimatum- was bound to fail.

Had John heard Sue's side of things, he might have understood that for Sue, the prerequisite for being close physically is emotional closeness and that Sue and Jeff had not been close for some time. He might have suggested that Jeff spend more time talking and paying attention to her, and being her friend. It's easy to see how John's well-meaning advice- spice up your sex life- fell flat on its face.

### **Protectors and rescuers**

Another reason friends and family can increase the odds you will be divorce-bound is that, because they can't bear to see you in pain, they will steer you to what they think is the quickest escape from the emotional torture. They convince themselves and then you that, since your spouse is the problem, get rid of him or her. "Just leave. You don't deserve this. Just get out."

But you need to be aware of a couple of things when you listen to this advice. First of all, although your friends and family care about you, their advice is also self-serving. It will make them feel better if you aren't so sad. It will be a relief for them when you stop crying or feeling so torn. They want an end to this unhappiness. Problem is, if you follow their advice and make them feel better, you'll be divorced and supporting yourself (and your kids), changing your lifestyle, making adjustments, and starting all over, they won't. Even if your loved ones are already divorced and believe that their divorce has improved lives dramatically, it doesn't mean that you will feel this way too. No two people are alike.

Second, this whole idea – get rid of your partner and leave your troubles behind- is about the most absurd notion I've ever heard. To begin with, if you have children, unless your partner is the kind of person who will leave the planet, never to be heard of again, don't count on getting rid of your spouse. When children are involved, there is no such thing as divorce. Your spouse will be in your life forever. And I mean forever. You'll be in constant communication about visitation, decisions about your children's welfare, holidays, money, vacations, issues pertaining to the relationship between the children and new male or female friends/marital partners. The list is endless.

**One woman wrote me,**

I've been divorced for twenty-three years. When I decided to get a divorce I never thought about the fact that my ex would be in my life forever. I realized that we would be in touch weekly because of our kids, but I guess I thought that when the kids got older, he would just disappear from my life. And here it is, my grown daughter is about to give birth next week and for the first time, I realized that my ex and I are going to be "the grandparents" together. What was I thinking?" Spouses don't disappear.

Spouses don't disappear with a divorce and neither do your problems. Although it may be true that a person is hard to get along with, the truth is, when you're experiencing marital problems it's almost always the result of how two people interact. In other words, in a marriage, two people develop relationship habits, and if you leave, you take your habits with you when you go. Ever hear the expression, "Everywhere you go, there you are.?" Well, it's true. Let me give you an example.

Deb and Ron had a great marriage in the early years. She admired and respected his decisiveness and take-charge personality. She felt her father was a weak man who rarely stood up to her mother's incessant ranting and raving. That's why Ron's strength really appealed to her. Now she thought that he was overbearing and dominating.

At first, she tried to tell him to stop being so controlling, but he defended his actions and brushed her feelings aside. From that day forward, she kept her resentments and bitterness inside. She figured, "What's the use?" The end result is that she walked around most days being furious at him, without his even knowing it. Over time, she could no longer stand the bottled up anger and filed for divorce. After all, she thought, if I get rid of this controlling man, I will be able to find myself again and make my own decisions. After a long, drawn out battle, they finally divorced.

The problem is, by thinking that Ron was the sole cause of their marital breakdown, Deb was blind to the ways in which her own behavior contributed to their problems. Let's assume that Deb's perception of Ron is accurate; that he had become overly controlling in their marriage. However, this didn't happen overnight. Although Deb initially tried to get Ron to back off, when her requests fell on deaf ears, instead of trying a new and more dynamic approach, she backed down and did nothing. For years, she did nothing. The more she did nothing, the more he took over. In a sense, Deb created her monster.

And the sad part about all this is, when Deb divorces Ron, she will feel relieved momentarily to be free of his presence, but if and when she remarries, she will enter her new relationship unenlightened about how to deal with the differences that naturally occur between any two people. That's because she ran away from her relationship problems rather than solved or learned from them. And since she failed to see her role in the demise of their relationship, she is destined to make one of two mistakes.

The first is to marry someone similar to Ron and recreate the exact same problems. The second is to fool herself thinking marriage will be infinitely easier if she marries someone who is totally different from Ron - and that's what Deb did. Deb purposely sought out a man who is gentle and laid back. At first, it felt like her life's dream. She doesn't have to walk on eggshells because no one is looking over her shoulder. She didn't have to be afraid to voice her feelings because he will listen rather than criticize. She felt she could be herself for the first time in years.

Time passed and now Deb felt that her laid-back, gentle man was wimpy and unmotivated. He made less money than her first husband. He wasn't overly ambitious. She disliked that she now had to help him support the children financially. When she asked him what he wanted to do on weekends, he always said, "I don't care, it's up to you." Although she always used to appreciate his easy-going attitude, now she was frustrated by his indecisiveness. When she talked to him about her feelings, he got emotional and cried. Deb wanted to avoid feeling controlled in her life, but this was more than she bargained for. Rather than find productive ways to get through to her husband and get more of her needs met, Deb found herself thinking about divorce once again. And as before, she reassured herself that the problems in her marriage had nothing to do with her.

The obvious lesson here is that when a marriage fails, no matter how tempting it might be to put all the blame on one spouse's shoulders, both spouses have contributed to its downfall.

Look, we all need people on our side, people who will stand by us no matter what. But before you are too quick to heed the advice of your personal fans, you must remember this. Their opinions are biased. They can't always see the forest for the trees. If you leave conversations feeling supported but solutionless, be wary. You might be in the midst of being initiated into the divorce trap's steering committee.

### **Well-meaning Therapists**

Often people recognize that friends and family can be biased and, for that reason, decide to seek professional help for their marriage. Unfortunately, going to a therapist when you are having marital problems doesn't guarantee you will leave with your marriage intact. Some therapists believe that when a marriage stops being fulfilling or nurturing, it's time to move on. They see divorce as a challenging, yet viable solution to marriage's many problems. They appreciate the impact of divorce on children, but they prefer to focus on children's resiliency and their ability to adjust. Although they might initially try to help couples beyond their differences, if the path to solution is rocky, they are quick to suggest calling it quits. They see divorce as a rite of passage. But why?

To begin with, you need to know that, first and foremost, therapists are people. No matter how well trained they may be, what you get when you seek therapy is the person behind the therapist. All people have life experiences that help shape who they are, their beliefs, their values, their morals, and their interests, and therapists are no exception. It's literally impossible for therapists to check their values and perspectives at the door at the start of a therapy session.

A therapist's views about marriage are influenced by many things, including the quality of his or her own parent's marriage. For example, if the therapist's parents had a highly combative marriage and made no attempt to improve things, making it miserable for the kids, the therapist might believe that people are better off divorcing when there is tension and steer the sessions in that direction. If a therapist's father had affairs and the therapist observed the hurt that it caused in the family, he might believe that marriages can not heal after infidelity. If a therapist grew up with two parents who calmly talked things out when there was trouble, and if you and your mate have a more hotheaded problem-solving style, she might believe that you are incompatible or that your marriage is dysfunctional, and might suggest you separate. This is unfortunate because research shows that many hot-headed couples love each other to death and manage to solve problems just as well as those who are more controlled. If, in growing up, a therapist's had a really stormy relationship with her father, it's possible that she might have negative feelings about men and continually side with the woman in the couple. This sort of bias is never productive and likely to result in insurmountable resistance on the part of the man who feels outnumbered, or in his dropping out of therapy, neither of which bodes well for the marriage. In short, therapists can't separate who they are from what they do.

The same is true for me. Do you remember what I told you about my own parent's divorce on my own marriage and in my work with couples? It made me a true believer in the sanctity of marriage. How does this pro-marriage bias effect what I do when I work with people?

For starters, each time I meet a person or couple and hear about their marriage problems, my default position is, "This marriage can be saved." Obviously, I am not always right and some marriages do end in divorce, but my positive attitude has served my clients well. Most couples stay together and find renewed happiness with each other.

I don't panic or even become discouraged when I hear people's doubts about their marriages or when I'm told about complicated marital problems. I've worked with people who had experienced severe marital problems- multiple affairs, a divorce in the works, months of separation, a loss of love and/or lust- and, in the eleventh hour, were able to fall back in love. I mean, really fall back in love. So, as I've said before, problems aren't roadblocks, just bumps in the road.

Contrast this "Never say die," philosophy with the approach many other therapists take with couples. Many therapists assess the viability of people's marriages based on the types of problems they are having, the severity of these problems, how long they have lasted and how optimistic both partners are about the possibility of change. If the problems are long-standing or one partner expresses intense doubt about the marriage, the therapist becomes pessimistic, starts to doubt that the marriage can be saved and begins to work towards separation.

I, on the other hand, completely understand why people feel pessimistic. Anyone who has suffered in a marriage over a long period of time will, by definition, feel despondent. I see the hopelessness as a normal reaction to a painful situation rather than a telltale sign about the marriage's future. I proceed with the knowledge that, once we find workable solutions, the hopelessness will vanish. Hopelessness doesn't derail me.

Too many therapists give people the message that divorce is a reasonable solution when hopelessness exists. How? In many ways, but here is one example. People often go to therapists for affirmation that getting out is the right thing to do. They feel really torn and they are looking for that "expert opinion". Some people even ask their therapist outright, "Don't you think I've tried everything,?" "Do you think my marriage is over?" The truth is no matter how many degrees a therapist might have, or how smart he or she might be, there is absolutely no way for a therapist to know when a marriage has reached a dead end. Therapists can't tell when a marriage is over.

But this doesn't stop many therapists from acting as if they have a crystal ball. They say, "If your husband won't attend therapy, it means he's not committed to your marriage and nothing you do will make a difference," or "It seems as if your wife has lost feeling for you, why don't you just get on with your life,?" or "As long as your husband is having an affair, you might as well assume your marriage isn't going to survive," or "Why are you hanging on to this marriage, your wife has already filed for divorce?" Although these predicaments might make marital repair more challenging, none of them is, by any means, a marital death sentence. Far from it! Telling people that their marriage is doomed is, in my opinion, fortune telling at best, unethical, at worst!

Besides therapists' personal experiences, there are other reasons they might not be advocates for marriage. Their professional training may stand in the way. Although it may seem strange, the whole premise upon which traditional therapy is based may not be conducive to helping people work out problems when the going gets tough. For instance, therapists are trained to encourage people to pursue the parts of their lives that will bring personal happiness and satisfaction, even if these goals are at odds with what's best for the marriage, the children or even the individual in question in the long run. The therapist wants you to feel good and do whatever it takes to make that happen

I once saw a couple on the verge of divorce- thanks to a therapist the man had seen. The wife and child had moved back to their home town, several thousand miles from their current home, in order to receive family support for their disabled child. Because they were having a hard time selling their home, the husband decided to remain with the home until it was sold. During the time they were separated, he had a great deal of freedom. There were no responsibilities as a husband or father. He could work, go to his health club and be with his friends as much as his little heart delighted. And he did. He was having a ball. That's when he started to question his marriage. He thought to himself, "I really enjoy my life as a single person, I wonder if there is something wrong with my marriage." So he sought the help of a professional.

The therapist helped him to uncover feelings of discontent with his marriage and his life as a family man. She suggested that perhaps he had always been a "pleaser," that is, that he put effort into making everyone happy but himself. Her solution? "Get out of your marriage. Start anew. Be self-determining. Follow your heart." Psychobabble poison.

He eventually confessed his ambivalence to his wife who was devastated. She had no idea he was unhappy in their marriage! They agreed to schedule an appointment with me. When I saw them, I somewhat agreed with the therapist's assessment, that he had lost himself in the marriage, rarely openly expressing his desires and often going along with the program, despite his own wishes. However, instead of thinking that his path to happiness was for him to abandon his marriage and daughter, I saw better route; to help him become more forthcoming with his wife and find ways to meet his needs within the context of his marriage. Believe me, it was a no-brainer. I saw them for only three sessions and they were happier than ever! He became more honest with his wife- only agreeing to do that which he really wanted to do and letting her know when he was disappointed about things - and she loved it. She no longer had to wonder whether he was doing things to placate her which only backfired later. Their marriage flourished. I placed a follow-up call to them a year later and they were pregnant with their second child! So much for a marriage doomed for divorce!

Another significant aspect of therapists' training that makes marriage preservation more challenging is the idea that in order to solve problems, people must first understand what caused the problems. What this means is that if a couple is having marital difficulties, instead of helping that couple identify things they can do immediately to feel closer and more connected, the therapist first gathers lots of information about how each spouse was raised. This is unfortunate because research shows that the average time a couple experiences problems before initiating therapy is six years! Six years! So, that by the time most couples seek help, they are in desperate need of answers. They yearn for solutions. They don't need to become experts on why they are stuck! If therapy fails to offer an immediate sense of relief or hope that solutions are possible, most couples become more despondent and more likely to throw in the towel.

Another belief inherent in most theories therapy is the idea that people will get along better if they just express their feelings openly and honestly. In general, this is true. However, when couples are really in trouble, the problem isn't a matter of not knowing how each partner feels. In most cases, people know precisely how

their partners feel- they're totally at odds- they just don't have a clue as to what they can do to resolve the differences between them. Therapists are often more skilled at helping people identify and express hurt and angry feelings, than they are at helping people negotiate their differences. So therapy often ends up being more like a bitch session than a blame-free, brain-storming session. And, as a result, people end up feeling their marriages are really in bad shape and not worth preserving.

I don't mean to imply that all therapy is bad. It isn't! Therapy can be a lifesaver! There are lots of really competent, caring therapists out there. But, if you do decide to seek professional help, you need to make sure that you are seeking the help of an individual who believes that marriages are worth saving and who has been trained specifically to work with couples. Later in this book, I will offer some guidelines for choosing a good marital therapist.

### **The Media Myth-Makers**

I once worked with a man who told me that he needed to divorce his wife because he didn't think he loved her anymore. I asked him, "What makes you think so?" He replied, "It's just not the way I see it in the movies." I had been a therapist for approximately fifteen years at the time and I thought I had heard everything. I was wrong.

Hollywood can not be faulted for offering unrealistic portrayals of what really goes on behind closed doors. After all, it's their job to entertain, not educate us. Yet, in a media-saturated society, it's hard not to be influenced by the images with which we are bombarded- perfect hard bodies, impassioned, breathless sex, and heart-stopping romance. If our relationships don't quite measure up, we start to think we're being short-changed, and want to upgrade to the new and improved model.

But the truth is, good marriages can be incredibly boring. There's nothing sexy about making dinner, paying bills, caring for elderly parents, changing diapers, and chauffeuring kids to soccer games. There's nothing titillating about sitting together in silence while one person watches television and the other reads. No major box-office hit here! The really good things about marriage - the comfort spouses feel in each other's presence, the unspoken glances that speak volumes, the little things people do for each other, the certainty that they will wake up next to each other in bed every morning- are about as compelling to watch as watching paint dry. That's why realism is in short supply on the silver screen. It wouldn't sell.

Nowadays, if Hollywood isn't busy glamorizing marriage, it's busy taking the sting out of divorce, another realism-zapper. Sitcoms, movies and cartoons depicting non-traditional families are the norm. And everyone seems to be doing just fine. The message is clear - the nuclear family is a thing of the past and we're no worse for the wear. Viewers aren't exposed to the real trials and tribulations of blending families or of raising children as a single parent. We don't see the War-of-Roses-type arguments that often occur between spouses as they pit their biological children against their step-children. We're not told how these arguments often account for the fact that 60% of second marriages end in divorce. We don't hear about the poverty and other challenges that often accompany single parenthood, especially for women. Television makes life after divorce seem easy.

Beyond making marriage look more glamorous than life, and divorce less noxious than in reality, the media biases people's perspective about marriage by being obsessed with bad news. The National Marriage Project at Rutgers University released a report that received more than its fair share of attention. It reported the depressing news that the U.S. marriage rate has never been lower, births to unmarried women have skyrocketed, the divorce rate remains high and Americans' marriages are less happy than in the past. Wire services, widely read newspapers and magazines had a field day. At last, something about marriage that they could sink their teeth into. Radio talk shows were buzzing with guests hypothesizing why the institution of marriage is headed for disaster.

Although few could debate the data offered by this now famous report, it is equally undebatable this news such reflects just one side of the coin. We rarely read or hear about the good news about marriage. For instance, did you know that The Wall Street Journal reported that a long-term marriage is a new status symbol? Or, were you aware that surveys tell us that Americans continue to say that a happy marriage is their number one goal and that approximately 85-90% of us are still getting married? Did you know that in a recent survey of this nation's most wealthy people- those in the 99th percentile of taxpayers- it was noted that 71 percent were married to their first spouse? (Barrons) Unless you have been living on another planet, I know you know that 50% of marriages end in divorce, but have you ever wondered why 50% of marriages last? Have you ever considered what makes these long-term marriages different? Do you know about the most popular and longest running column in magazine history - "Can this Marriage Be Saved?" - in Ladies Home Journal? It is an upbeat, positive column describing the steps different couples take to solve their marital problems. People can't get enough of it. Why, if despite the odds, people are still yearning to get married and live happily ever after, do we constantly hear about the demise of marriage? Why is the media's glass half-empty? And more importantly, what are the pitfalls of such a pessimistic focus?

I strongly believe that the constant barrage of negative data about marriage takes its toll on society. We start to believe that divorce is one of life's normal rites of passage; we fall in love, we get married, we have children and we divorce. This acceptance of divorce as the norm makes it more likely that, instead of doing what it takes to make marriages work, when the going gets rough, we just leave.

Imagine for a moment, that instead of all the doom-and-gloom predictions about marriage, we were inundated with love's success stories. We'd read in-depth interviews about couples who have been married fifty years or more, we'd learn of data about those who have risen above difficult marital problems such as infidelity and about the hundreds of thousands of couples whose lives have been changed by taking a simple marriage education course. We'd receive updated information about the ways in which long-term marriage benefits men, women, children and society as a whole. Just think about how our collective unconsciousness might be altered if the media spent a fraction of the time investigating why marriage works instead of informing and warning us about the death of marriage.

### **The Legal System**

"If there is one lawyer in town, he will starve to death. If there are two, both will make a good living."

Sometimes, when people are unhappy in their marriages and unsure about whether they should leave or not, they go to an attorney to check out their rights and get a peek into their future as a single person. This, in and of itself, is not a bad idea, but there are some things you should know about the divorce process before you pick up the phone.

When you go to a divorce attorney, what you get is someone who specializes in the divorce process, not reconciliation. People often seek legal advice, not because they are 100% sure they want to divorce, but because they want to gather information and feel that they are protecting themselves. Although many attorneys pick up on people's ambivalence and suggest counseling, this is not necessarily always the case. It's their job to facilitate a divorce, not to suggest reconciliation. Besides, the thinking goes that by the time you schedule an appointment with an attorney, you have already considered all the alternatives and you are ready to terminate your marriage.

Once you start the legal ball rolling, it becomes your lawyer's primary responsibility to get you "a fair deal" which translates to "the best possible deal"; the most money, the most time with your children, the least amount of interference from your ex-spouse and so on. They're ethically bound to operate from this premise; it's their job. The problem is, your spouse's attorney is charged with the same responsibility. The end result is that the divorce process becomes extremely adversarial. It's you against your spouse. Divorces are part of our adversary process. By design, the system pits one party against the other. The theory is that the decision-maker (the judge) has the benefit of the most persuasive argument from each side and the attack by cross-examination reveals the weaknesses of each side's position. Though this may be an effective way to make decisions in commercial and criminal cases, it certainly is not appropriate for the troubled family. It pits husband against wife, mother against father and hostility escalates into the ultimate war, the trial.

Divorce-Without-War

Although protecting oneself is important, sometimes the very things you do to protect your personal interests, jeopardize the slightest hope that you and your partner will remain civil to one another, let alone reconsider reconciliation.

Consider Greg, a man who desperately wanted to save his marriage. His wife was having an affair and felt fairly certain she wanted out. She was overt about her unfaithfulness, often flaunting her affair in Greg's face. Greg was trying really hard not to be reactive because he hoped that the affair would eventually die a natural death. Indeed, research shows that affairs often end and reconciliation is possible as long as the betrayed spouse doesn't become retaliatory.

Greg's attorney felt that he wasn't taking a strong enough stand. He suggested that they try to get an order to prevent the man from having any contact with Greg's children. He also suggested that the man's questionable financial history be made public in order to cast him in a negative light. Although, given Greg's feelings about that man and his wife's indiscretion, I understood why such a suggestion would be appealing, I also knew that had Greg followed his attorney's advice, it would only have incited his wife, etching their divorce in stone. In this case, winning the legal battle would mean losing the marriage-saving war.

But divorce attorneys are hired to "win" and rather than consider a particular legal act's implications on future relationship dynamics.

Divorce attorneys clearly understand that divorce is as much a psychological war, as it is a legal war. That part of the process called "discovery" gives attorneys the tools with which to attack the opponent and to gain psychological as well as legal advantage. Depositions (examinations before trial) of friends, family and business

associates, production of tons of documents, scrutinizing personal activities, and evaluation and criticism of each spouse's role as parent, are all part of the tactics used to bring your opponent to their knees. Divorce-Without-War

If, for example, in your heated discussions about the possibility of divorce, it becomes clear that both you and your spouse want full custody of your children, you will be in for a battle sure to make whatever positive feelings you might have had about your spouse vanish. You will be asked to compile as much information as you possibly can that will, not only portray you as the more fit parent, but, at the same time, portray your spouse as inept. To boost your case and comply with your attorney's requests, you scrutinize your memories for all of your partner's faults and failures both as a parent and as a co-parent. This biased jaunt down memory lane distorts your perception and robs you of any lingering feelings of appreciation for a shared history. And, to make matters worse, once you learn of your partner's portrayal of your shortcomings as a parent, the outrage you feel reconfirms in your own mind why you have been considering divorce in the first place.

Concern about the long-term damage done to relationships and families because of the adversarial nature of the legal process has prompted an alternative for those considering divorce- mediation. Mediation is a non-adversarial process involving an impartial third party who helps couples problem-solve, communicate more effectively and reach mutually agreed upon resolutions that are in the best interests of the family.

Although the goal of mediation is not reconciliation, nor should it be confused with marriage counseling, because of the collaborative nature of the process and its focus on building communication skills, couples opting for mediation often decide to reconcile rather than divorce. Even if divorce is the end result, the spirit of cooperation gained through the mediation process greatly benefits the couple's post-divorce relationship, which is especially important when children are involved. Unfortunately, not enough people consider mediation when their marriage is on the brink. If they did, it's possible that more marriages could be saved.

Now that you know what drives the divorce machine, you might wonder whether certain people are more susceptible to its influence than others. And the answer is yes.

#### **The Walkaway Wife Syndrome**

Although divorce offers the illusion of happiness to people of all ages, races, and personality types, there is one group that is particularly susceptible to the sound of the divorce siren. It's women. Approximately two thirds of the divorces in our country are filed for by women. What's going on here? Why are so many women throwing in the towel?

In the early years of marriage, women are usually the primary caretakers of the relationship. They're the ones who are doing a daily temperature check; "Have we had enough closeness today?" "Are we spending enough time together?" "Do we feel connected emotionally?" If the answer to these questions is, "Yes," life goes on. If not, women pursue for more closeness. They tell their husbands, "You don't value our relationship anymore," "We never do anything together," "Why do you always put work ahead of me?" Often, instead of recognizing their wives need for more closeness, men simply feel nagged and withdraw, emotionally and sometimes physically.

Because of this unresponsiveness, even hostility, women become frustrated. They soon try another approach- complaining about their partners' lack of involvement about everything else in their lives. "I feel like a single parent," "You are such a couch potato," "Why don't you ever lift a finger around the house? I do everything myself." Although they are still only trying to get their spouses' attention, men recoil big time. (I've never met a man who comes closer to his wife as a result of being "nagged," no matter what his wife's intentions!) After months or years of this negative interaction, women finally give up. They tell themselves, "I've tried everything. Divorce has got to be better than this. I'll find somebody who cares about me. Even if I don't, I'm so alone in this marriage, I can't take it anymore. I know I'll be happier without him." And, with that, they plan their escape.

Now, the interesting thing about this escape plan is that leaving usually hinges on a particular event which may take years to materialize. For example, "I'll leave my husband when the kids leave home," or "I'll get a divorce when I go back to school and learn new skills so I can support myself," or "I'm going to meet another man and as soon as I do, I will be out of here." And now comes the tricky part.

In the months, years that follow her decision, the wife is no longer trying to fix the marriage. She stops complaining. To her, this surrender to the inevitable is definitely a bad thing. To him, well, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to figure out what the husband thinks. He's thrilled! She's off his back. She must be happy again, or so he thinks and he proceeds with business as usual. Business as usual, that is, until "D Day". That's the day she turns to him and says, "I want a divorce," to which her absolutely devastated husband replies, "I had no idea you were unhappy! Why didn't you tell me?" With that response, the marital coffin is nailed shut.

The tragedy of this situation is that this is the point at which most men finally understand the depth of their wives' unhappiness and want to make genuine changes in themselves. They are willing to do back flips to keep their marriages/families together. They are finally ready to do the kind of soul-searching that would make having a great marriage possible. But by that point, most women have built an impenetrable wall around them, one that is impervious to men's efforts to change. And it's divorce, full speed ahead.

I'm convinced if more women knew the truth about divorce, they might not be so quick to dismiss their husband's offers to become better people and partners. They might actually stick around long enough to find out if their husbands really mean what they say about changing.

### **The Anytime Mid-life Crisis**

Don't get me wrong. Men get lured by the divorce trap too. They get fooled into believing that life would be better if only they were single, had more and better sex, more adoration, fewer responsibilities and obligations, more nights out with the guys, less "henpecking" and so on. Many otherwise sane, moral, responsible men wake up one morning and start to question their very being. They scrutinize their lives. They feel something is missing. They're not happy. In fact, they're downright depressed and withdrawn. Sometimes they can't put a finger on it. There's just a gnawing sense that something is wrong and a growing urgency to do something about it. And though they really aren't sure what's ailing them, they convince themselves they need to leave their marriages to find out.

Other times, men think they know what's at the root of their unhappiness. "I hate all this responsibility. Life is short, I don't want to feel so burdened all the time." "I got married for the wrong reasons - she was pregnant, we were too young, I was desperate to get out of my house, I felt pressured by her." "She's always so rejecting and critical. I want to find someone who appreciates me." "Our sex life has been non-existent, I don't want to live like this anymore." "My father died a few months ago and it made me realize that I don't want to be in a marriage where there is conflict."

Perhaps these rationales sound familiar. Can you say mid-life crisis? If your husband is between 40-50, and he's developed a recent interest in working out, eating healthfully, buying new clothes, and has been eyeing that proverbial red convertible, (or some other, less expensive boy toy) you might have already suspected a mid-life crisis. And you may be right! But it's been my experience that men can have what's been termed a "mid-life" crisis at almost any time in their lives. In fact, even men in their 20's have been known to feel despondent about their lot in life and start fantasizing about greener pastures. Although they don't have balding heads, expanding waistlines, and wrinkles with which to do psychological battle, these younger men are, nonetheless, acutely aware of the happiness clock ticking speedily away. Rather than confront or fix what's wrong in their lives or in their marriages, many of these men try to free themselves from their depression and anxiety by picking up and leaving.

Wives of these men try to talk sense into them. They give them books about mid-life crises. They cut out magazine articles and leave them around the house. They recruit friends to talk to their husbands. They pull out wedding pictures to jar memories of happier times. When that doesn't work, they urge their husbands to see a therapist about depression. They suggest Prozac or, for the more health-minded, St. John's Wort. They leave pamphlets about clinical depression strewn on desks or beside toilet seats, where the reading material is piled. But alas, none of these desperate attempts to defog their divorce-prone men seems to make a dent. In fact, the urge to escape becomes even stronger.

### **Beating the odds**

If reading about the pervasiveness of the divorce trap has made you pessimistic or overwhelmed, don't be. I've got some good news for you. No matter how rough your situation might be, you can beat the odds! You really can. I've helped thousands of people teetering on the marital edge reverse the momentum to make their marriages more loving. I can say with confidence that **YOU CAN SAVE YOUR MARRIAGE!** In fact, the reason I am writing this book is to show you in a step-by-step fashion precisely how to do that.

If you're someone who is considering divorce, I want to congratulate you for even reading this far. It's tempting to avoid anything that challenges your thoughts about leaving. You just want to get on with your life. You're tired of people - your spouse, family members, friends - trying to get you to change your mind. They don't live in your shoes, they don't feel your pain. What makes them think they know what's best for you? And now, to make matters worse, you've got some marriage therapist who doesn't know you from a hole in the wall warning you to abandon your last hope for happiness. But still, you're reading. For this, I give you a world of credit. You must have a gnawing sense that divorce might not be the answer for you.

If you are considering divorce, I want you to know that I agree with you if you think that life is too short to be miserable. It's true that we only have one go-around and that your life isn't a dress rehearsal. You need to hear me say that I am not suggesting you stay in an unhappy marriage and resign yourself to loneliness and misery. Far from it. That wouldn't be good for anyone! But in recent years, we've learned a ton about why some

couples are able to keep their love alive while others aren't. And it all boils down to one thing- skills, relationship skills. How you handle conflict, how you communicate, how you problem -solve- all determine how strong or fragile your love bond will be.

Unfortunately, most of us never learned these skills from our parents. So how in the world should we know what to do when things get rocky? If your partner hasn't been loving, affectionate or communicative, it's probably because he or she doesn't know how. If you've been unsuccessful in getting through to your spouse and getting more love in your life, it's not because your spouse is evil, it's just because you need better tools to reach him or her. And that's easy. I can teach you new skills to make your marriage the marriage you've always wanted. All you need to do is to approach this book with half of an open mind, (maybe even a quarter of an open mind), put my techniques into practice and I'll do the rest of the work.

Maybe you are saying to yourself, "I've tried everything, why should I invest myself only to be disappointed again?" I'm telling you, you haven't tried everything. I've been working with couples for many, many years and when they think they've tried everything, they've usually tried similar things over and over. I'm not suggesting that you totally give up any thought of going your separate ways, all I'm saying is for you to agree to give the methods in this book a few weeks or months to work. Then decide. You can always get divorced. That's always an option. I strongly suggest you give your marriage the last try it really deserves. You'll sleep better at night if you do.

Or perhaps you are reading this because a divorce is about the last thing on earth that you want. In the pages that follow, I am going to spell out for you exactly what you need to do to reverse the downward spiral in your marriage. I will share with you everything I know about saving marriages from the brink of divorce. If you follow the seven-step program in this book carefully, it will be just as if you are in my office with me. You'll learn what you need to do to turn things around, how to evaluate your partner's responses and reactions, and what to do next. I will give you lots of examples of people who were in your shoes and how they rejuvenated their love. I will offer you the building blocks for change. But I'm going to be completely honest with you.

First, you, not your spouse, are going to have to do the lion's share of the work here. Because your spouse is skeptical, at best, you are the one who is going to have to prove that life together with you can be different. You may not like the fact that this feels so one-sided, but for now, I say, "That's too bad." That's just how it is. Get used to this idea, swallow your pride and push up your sleeves.

Second, in *Divorce Busting*, I gave people the impression that change could happen overnight. It could and sometimes does. But, thanks to the feedback I've gotten from readers and clients, I now know that it usually doesn't. It takes longer. Look, it probably took years for your marriage to reach this point and repairing the damage will take time. If you are an impatient person by nature- when you want something, you want it now- you are going to have to work on yourself to slow down. I can offer you some tips about keeping calm when things seem at a standstill, but in this case, patience is more than a virtue, it's a necessity.

Finally, there are no guarantees. Sometimes, you can seven-step until the cows come home and it might not save your marriage. But I can tell you that unless you follow the steps in this book, you will never know for sure whether or not your marriage could have been saved. Right now, you've got nothing to lose and everything to gain. People who follow the *Divorce Remedy* program felt better about themselves and more optimistic in general no matter what.

Having said all that, I want you to know that if I didn't believe your marriage could be saved, I wouldn't have wasted my time writing this book. If we can put men on the moon, eliminate life-threatening diseases, develop a vast network of world-wide communication, surely we can figure out a way to keep love alive. I believe I know how and when you're done with this book, you will too.

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