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## 7 Tips for Every Newly Married Couple From Prince William and Kate Middleton to the Average Jane and Joe

By B.J. and Sheila Weber

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Given the failure of marriages which were previously deemed unbreakable (think royal), we offer the following 7 tips, which are hardly inclusive of everything one needs to know, but can help couples get out of the starting gate on better footing.

### 1. Expect Challenges

Unexpected conflict can surprise you when it surfaces after the wedding, or even years later. Challenges will come, so it's best to realize that they are normal. While it is unhealthy to live in a pattern of hostility, don't think that unexpected difficulty or conflict means you should start looking for the exit ramp. Find someone to help you navigate the issues and learn new ways to communicate and resolve problems. Great marriages are committed to navigating the conflicts. Marriage is the greatest tool for personal growth and maturity.

### 2. Listen. Talk. Find a Mentor.

Communication is obviously the key to any great relationship and we can't do full justice to the issue except to summarize:

- 1) We don't really "hear" what another person is saying because we either react defensively or think only of what we want to say in response. Most people just want to know they have been heard and their feelings were understood.
- 2) Don't bury your feelings, but learn how to wisely make your deepest needs known.
- 3) Avoid saying "You always....You never." Use "I feel" terms instead. (This is basic Communication 101 that many have heard, but still don't practice.)
- 4) Ask directly for forgiveness, and respond with forgiveness. Holding hands when you talk helps break a cycle of anger. Research also finds that couples who pray privately and regularly together have vastly more successful marriages.
- 5) Find a trusted friend or older, wiser couple who will be supportive of your marriage (not just affirm your negativity), and will help you, ideally both of you together, work through issues of communication.

### 3. Maintain Intimacy

Keep the sexual component of your marriage intact. Don't take your partner's fidelity for granted. Even if there are times of understandable sexual slow down, (raising children can cause exhaustion, aging brings changes in capacity), stay determined not to let these seasons bring intimacy to a halt. Unavoidable seasons of abstinence should not be used to create guilt or foster bitterness, but rather lead to a mutual determination that even in stressful times you will not let weeks pass without sex, because then you allow your relationship to veer into the friends zone, and that can be a challenge to work your way out of (but you can and must). No matter what, stay faithful.

### 4. Don't use the "D" Word

Divorce should not be a part of your relationship vocabulary. It creates subconscious damage that is hard to repair. Marriage functions best when it is viewed as a covenant and not consumer relationship—meaning it is a lifelong vow, not something disposable if your needs are not met. When divorce is taken off the table, it does not give you free rein to do whatever you please—since the end result of irresponsible selfishness can be too painful to survive—but it can give couples the impetus to make the relationship as good as it can be. Protect the affection you started with—don't blow it by doing something you don't

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realize you will deeply regret later. Removing the option of divorce can bring security to the relationship and a deeper motivation to make the relationship as happy and rewarding as it can be.

#### 5. "Date" Each Other

It may seem you have plenty of together time when you plop in front of the TV every night, but a strong marriage, like parenting, is also about quality time. Go out for dinner, take in a movie, go for a walk. Find something you might like in common—cross country skiing, book clubs, ballroom dance classes, or church study groups. Eat, Talk, Play—have regular family or two-some sit-down dinners with soothing music and candles. Talk about your day, current events, or personal challenges. Make plans to do something fun—whether it's ping pong, visiting a museum, biking, going to theater, playing games, or making a picnic.

#### 6. Women Most Need Love; Men Most Need Respect

For us, this was a revolutionary concept that changed our tone and overall approach toward each other. We must give credit to Dr. Emerson Eggerichs and his best-selling book and conference, "Love and Respect." Of course, men and women need both love and respect, but our hierarchy of deepest need is different. Without love, she reacts to him without respect; without respect he reacts without love towards her, and the crazy cycle starts spinning out of control. There is a way to jump off the "crazy cycle," says Eggerichs, and we recommend you learn how.

#### 7. Begin With the End in Mind

You can't imagine in younger years, but one day you will be old and potentially lonely. Your kids will have their own lives. If you carefully tend to your marriage, there will be the succor of companionship with someone who has been a witness to most of your entire life. Research shows that married people have greater financial resources, longer lives, better health, more personal happiness, and having both parents in the same home provides by far the best environment for raising children. Keep the long term goals in mind. Research shows it is actually worth staying together for the children.

We've heard countless stories of folks who worked through the seemingly impossible middle years, and came out on the other side of comfort and companionship in old age. Plus, the best way for the average Joe to build financial security for old age? Stay married.

We have no interest in making anyone feel guilty if they already have regrets or failure. No one starts at marriage, believing it will fail. Our advice is meant for helping people, whatever their current state, realize their deepest hopes for lifelong lasting love. With commitment and care, we believe newlywed princes and princesses—famous or not—can eventually reach "happily ever after."

*Married for 30 years, B.J. and Sheila Weber live in midtown Manhattan, where they raised their now grown son and married daughter. Sheila is the executive director of a new effort to strengthen marriage, National Marriage Week USA (February 7-14 each year), and Reverend William John (B.J.) Weber for many years served as chaplain to New York area professional sports teams and currently offers crisis marriage intervention as part of his work as president of the New York Fellowship.*

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