

Must-Have  
**MARRIAGE and COUPLES**  
**CHECK-LIST**  
For a “Happily Ever-After”

By Paul W Anderson, PhD



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# Dedication

*To the many couples who over the last 40 years have taught me about what works and what does not to have a **durable, endearing and fun** relationship*

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## Introduction

**“And they lived happily ever-after,”** or so we’re led to believe.

Apparently, many couples believe in and want this dream. The movies and fairy tales suggest happy endings are possible. The catch is that they rarely show us **how** to do that. Our American culture leads us to believe that if a couple loves each other, that’s all they will need to find their “happily ever-after.”

Yet, after finding each other, a couple faces challenges and obstacles they did not expect or imagine. They do not have the knowledge or skills to stay out of trouble and keep the marital tension at bay. They do not have the special communications skills for highly intimate and emotional conversations. Things blow up. They are adrift on a sea of emotional turmoil. They soon conclude they and or their partner is at fault, the wrong person for them or blame someone else for the “mistake” of having hooked up with their mate.

What comes to us from our culture about how to do marriage well is mostly baloney. Our society teaches us well how to find a mate but gives us very little support to keep the marriage healthy. We are not instructed as to **HOW** to deepen the relationship, let alone to enjoy each other more and more as the years go by.

The wedding is the beginning. The belief is that love is enough to make it to “ever-after.” But, the reality is that love is not enough to stay married with quality. Staying married with substance and quality is the adventure and that challenge takes effort, knowledge and skill. Much is at stake, so let’s do it right and well.

***“RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS ARE NOT DUE TO PROBLEM PEOPLE. INSTEAD, IT IS GOOD PEOPLE USING PROBLEM PATTERNS THAT CREATES THE TROUBLE. CHANGE THE PATTERNS PEOPLE USE AND THINGS GET BETTER.”***

This is my checklist of the basic, must-have skills and traits necessary to keep a relationship healthy and well stocked with fun. All you and your partner have to do is use them.



Here's to your "Happily Ever-After!"

# Chapter 1

## ✓ Establish and Keep Communications Open

Your relationship should be a safe environment (emotionally, physically, in all ways) where each partner can freely express their thoughts and feelings without being judged. Here's how to keep it that way:

- In the face of conflict and or misunderstandings, don't talk to friends about issues involving your spouse. Don't go behind your partner's back. Go to your mate first. And no stone walling or silent treatment to your partner.
- If one person needs a break or recess in the talking, that's fair. But negotiate that with your partner first before you do a time out. Set a time and place to get back to the issue. If not, taking a break works like an insult and a big blow to respect for the other person. It's a hit below the belt, as it were
- Often I hear the excuse, "Well, I'm conflict avoidant so I shut down and withdraw during arguments." Doing that is a very powerful, but passive emotional weapon. Sure, conflict is not easy. It's good to stay calm and thoughtful in the heat of tension. But shutting down leaves your partner in the dark not knowing what it means for you to withdraw.
- Keep the communication and talk going. At least show up with your spouse and make an effort. You can at the minimum say that you don't know what to say, that it's hard to talk about the topic.
- Talking without being judged or criticized is your life-line with each other. You can find ways to do this: write out your thoughts; talk on the phone; go to counseling where a professional can keep the tension at a manageable level. There are many options to use so you don't abandon your beloved just because you have a disagreement.

*Remember This:* It's not agreement and lack of conflict that keeps a marriage healthy. It's keeping the talk going and the process of communication open that matters. Fighting is a good and beneficial couple activity if you use the [Rules of Fair Fighting](#). A tennis game with a competitor matched to your level of play can be a good and fun experience, but it must be done by the rules.

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## Chapter 2

### ✓ Listen More, Defend Yourself Less

The problem pattern of communication people use is talking more than listening. I have been told I was given two ears and one mouth for a reason. Meaning: I should listen twice and speak once.

And you should not just “hear” what your spouse is saying so you can construct your rebuttal. Marriage is not a courtroom. Keep your relationship out of court by “listening” to *understand* what your loved one is saying. Understanding another person’s perspective does not mean you agree with it. Just listen.

- To be understood, one must first understand the other person. The key to that is listening. Don’t confuse listening with acceptance or agreement. Listening simple is taking in and getting what the other person is saying. It’s not about you. It’s about them. Just listen. Then say, “Thank you,” and be quiet until it’s your turn to talk.
- Don’t **WAD**. In the face of hot topics that evoke emotional tension couples have the tendency to WAD: **W**ithdraw – **A**ttack – **D**efend. A person can use all or any combination of these. None of them help your relationship. Don’t do WAD. They are avoidance patterns that rule out listening and being heard. Problems are not solved with WADing.

Remember This: Use “[Active Listening Skills](#)” so that your partner knows for sure you are paying attention to their message(s). That’s really all any of us want: someone to pay attention to us and say something like, “I get it. Thanks.” Then shut up until it’s your turn to speak to your partner who also knows how to listen and not defend or criticize or run away (WAD)





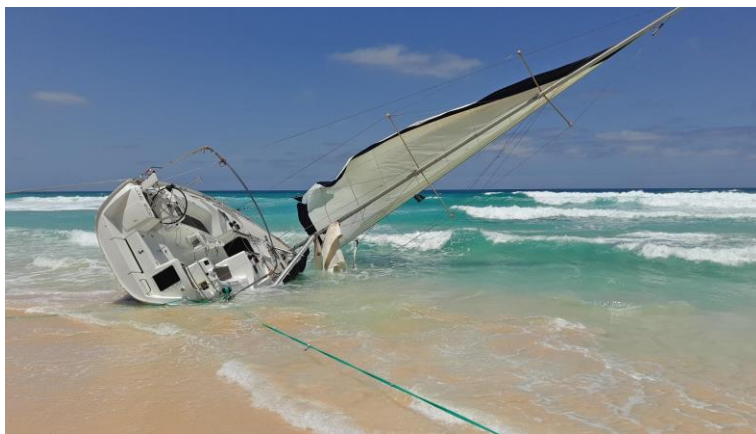
## Chapter 3

### ✓ Better To Be Nice Than Right

One of the pitfalls of marriage is when a spouse has to be right, always. And it follows that the other is mostly wrong, at least in the opinion of the one who is supposed to be right..

- From their perspective, they are as “right” as you think you are. Both of you are right, only different. Rather than insisting on your own opinion ruling the day, weigh the pros and cons of what your mate is saying. Then thank them for that.
- Each partner has their own voice and should be able to freely express it. However, this does not give you the authority to overpower the other party.
- Marital communications are not supposed to be power plays. Speak and listen to each other as if you loved them. You don’t have to love their opinions.
- The notion that agreement is necessary for a good marriage is the opposite from the truth. Your mate has as much right to be here, on this planet, and figure things out for themselves. They do not want you to tell them what the truth is. They want you to be their companion as they seek what is true for them.
- And I bet you want the same thing from them!

Remember This: In a marriage or significant relationship, “win-lose” means you both lose. If you’re the one to “win” that leaves you with a “loser” partner. Who wants that? If you must be right all the time, perhaps it’s not marriage you want but combat. Join a branch of the military. Otherwise, find ways for both of you to have a win.



## Chapter 4

### ✓ Physical Affection Required

Action speaks as loud (or louder) as words. Physically embrace your spouse at the end of the day, and let them feel the warmth of your love.

- According to neuro-economist Paul Zak, to be happy and have a great relationship, you must get at least eight hugs a day. Be generous to your partner. The simple act of a hug can do wonders for their health, as well as your own
- Each couple usually finds their “normal” for touching and physical affection. That’s good as long as it includes regular doses and with mutual consent.
- Point here is your relationship must have some way or the other of meeting the skin-hunger needs of both people.
- This requires regular checking in with each other as to what those needs may or may not be. People change and over the course of your relationship, as with all needs, what it takes to meet needs changes.
- To keep up with each other, couples need to consistently negotiate compromises.

*Remember This:* Don’t fall into the trap of either/or. Example: “If we start to touch or hug, we have to go ‘all the way’ into love making. So we seldom touch.”

That kind of either/or thinking will kill a marriage. Learn to moderate in all things, including “either/or.”



## Chapter 5

### ✓ Avoid Nagging at All Costs, Because Nagging Costs A Lot

You are not your partner's mom or teacher. It's not your job to keep telling them what to do. Sure, there are circumstances where your partner upsets you, like when they forget to flush the toilet or take forever to get ready to go out. But repeatedly repeating yourself, ironically, keeps things the same, the way you don't like. Nagging works against your stated outcomes.

- Nagging will never solve any of your concerns. It is an emotional acid that eats away at quality interactions and trust.
- For all you know, they might be doing this on purpose, consciously or otherwise, to bait you. Avoid these childish moves and act like adults. Sit down and find solutions which can end the ranting, nagging or haranguing.
- Be free to express what bothers you and why. But also allow the other to explain themselves so you can both negotiate a compromise about the issue you want to nag about.
- Stop nagging. Harping and repeating does not make things better. Find realistic solutions you can live with.

Remember This: A Rule of the Marriage Road; knock three times. If you don't get what you want or need after the third request, from then on your so called requests will be received by your mate as nagging, harassment or emotional abuse. What happens next, the issue is not your original request or finding a solution to what bothers you. It has now become an emotional conflict. This is when the fight starts.

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## Chapter 6

### ✓ Have an Attitude of Gratitude

Feeling unappreciated is not fun. To avoid the risk of your mate thinking you are taking them for granted, regularly tell them what about them you are grateful for about them.

- Don't assume your partner what things you are grateful for. Your spouse can not read your mind.
- A simple note or a "Thank you for (specially name the thing, trait or characteristic you are grateful for)," can make a difference in your lover's day. If one of you is the stay-at-home person, they can feel unappreciated after doing all the household chores and tending for the kids.
- The spouse who works outside the home can feel stressed out from deadlines, a demanding boss, traffic or stubborn clients. Expressing verbal tokens of appreciation and gratitude can ease up the tension in the relationship.
- Knowing when and how to say, "I'm sorry. I apologize," is a great way to shift out of anger or resentment and back into gratitude.

**Remember This:** Your expression of gratitude to your partner can make the world you live in a better place because your gratitude will make you feel better.



## Chapter 7

### ✓ Keep the Fire Burning. Date Each Other Forever

Among the common mistakes married couples fall into is to stop dating after they get married. It's as if a switch gets flipped or an item on a checklist is checked off. "OK, that's done. We're married and dating time is over. Let's move on to other things." Yeah, sure, at the peril of your own marriage you stop courting.

- Courtship must be a forever thing if you want to keep your marriage alive and evergreen.
- Keep the spark burning between you and your partner by enjoying regular romantic time together. Have a candlelit dinner or hop on a cruise to go on a vacation with your spouse. Keep an element of surprise in your courting. Try new ideas for dating events your partner least expects.
- Treat each other the same way you did back when you were dating as boyfriend and girlfriend.
- Be [very creative](#) with your dating and ways to have fun with each other.

**Remember This:** "Keep the fire going" is a metaphor that works because like a literal, real fire it will go out if not fed fuel. It is the same with your romance and emotional connection to your loved one. Fires do not take care of themselves. In this world, there is no such thing as an "eternal flame."



## Chapter 8

### ✓ Have Regular “Me-Time”

A couple consists of two individuals who commit to stay together with a sense of belonging to each other. Emphasis on “individuals.”

- To keep their individuality, each person must have their own endeavors and interests. This keeps each personality alive and differentiated. It helps to keep your partner interesting to you because they are unique and not a clone of yourself.
- Giving each other space and wiggle room to expand and develop themselves on their own, individually, can make a massive reduction in relationship tension.
- When each person feels complete, the relationship becomes better balanced between togetherness and separateness. People need both.
- Spouses should cheer each other on as they pursue their own projects and interests. This increases the level of confidence and trust that you have for each other as unique persons.

***Remember This:*** In America, if it is not scheduled, it likely won’t happen and certainly not on a regular, sustained basis. You must book your “Me-Time.” Put your time for self on the calendar.



## Chapter 9

### ✓ Do Domestic Chores Cheerfully

Sharing is a must for couples who want an egalitarian marriage. More than just the household chores and finances, each partner is expected to contribute to the house maintenance, parenting, decisions about large item purchases and other common experiences such as vacations and holidays.

- It's a great idea, yet couples struggle to implement this in their own realities. Some of this difficulty comes from not having grown up with role models showing how to practice mutual respect and partnership in marriage.
- Many parents raised their now adult children on the "traditional" model of marriage exemplified in TV shows like "Leave It to Beaver," and "All in the Family" with Archie Bunker and his subservient wife, Edith.
- Moreover, in America, money is the main source of power and respect. Because of that, he/she in the marriage who makes the money (or most money) is often deferred to as the boss who has the right to decide how money is spent in the family.
- Also, making the money is considered the most important contribution to family life. Therefore, other chores are secondary and the money maker is exempt from other household duties once the money's in the bank.
- A partnership marriage figures out ways to negotiate compromises and "pro-quit-quo" that each person can embrace as a balanced agreement for getting the "domestic chores" done equally and fairly. Both partners are equally empowered and make contributions to the welfare of the family which are equally valued.

*Remember This:* No one likes chores, but they must be done. In marriage, resentments are easy to sprout and then they grow if not brought into the light of dialogue. Doing the chores cheerfully requires regular review and re-evaluation. What worked in the first year of marriage most likely won't work now.

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## Chapter 10

### ✓ Have a Relationship Coach or Counselor Readily Available

Advisors or counselors shouldn't only come into your marital scene when the going is tough. When the level of tension and conflict get so high that you need outside intervention, finding the right support person then is difficult. Most couples can and will get to this point once in a while.

- Before the going gets tough, find someone you both respect and who you both will listen to. When you think you don't need it is the time to have a few sessions with them to get acquainted with all concerned. When you are calmer with each other you can lay the foundation of trust and determine if your advisor can stay neutral and not take sides.
- It is easier to use a counselor you already trust and know. It is also good for the counselor to know who you are as a couple before all the fighting starts.
- Your advisor does not have to be a professional counselor or psychologist. However, avoid selecting a friend or family member. They will lack objectivity when you need it the most.
- You may find a trusted elder in the community, a priest or mentor. But, by all means, make sure the person you pick is relatively unbiased toward one or the other of you to avoid taking sides when giving the marriage support. There should be no conflict of interest for them as they work with you.

*Remember This:* Consulting an advisor or counselor is like getting a second opinion. You don't have to follow the advice, but at least you have another perspective to consider as you make decisions and solve problems.

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## Chapter 11

### ✓ Having Checked Off All The Items Listed Above, It's Time to Say and Show "I love you," as Often as You Can.

"I love you." It takes three words to put fireworks into your sky. Be it in a text message, email, note, words spoken, physical touching, gifts or affirmations of admiration, do it.

- "Love" is a great feeling, but it is never enough to make a relationship work with quality. Loving to fly your own jet airplane is not enough to fly safely. Loving to do brain surgery is not enough. Likewise, marriage takes knowledge and skill, then work to apply that knowledge and skill. Oh, and lots of practice.
- Nevertheless, telling your spouse how much you love them is the bonus on top. Keep and feel the meaning of these sweet words that are only given to people who you genuinely and deeply care for.
- Be specific about what endears you to your beloved mate.
- Keep the romance alive with actions as well as words.
- Celebrate significant anniversaries, beginning with your first date, your engagement date and of course, don't forget your wedding anniversary. As the years go by, more dates and times to commemorate will be added. Keep a list or running calendar of them all.

***Remember This:*** There are many effective ways to communicate, "I love you." Partners often use different "languages" to give and get love messages. Make sure you and your mate know these differences about each other and implement them in your love talks.



## Chapter 12

### ✓ The Short Course

I call this the “Short Course to a Happy Ever-After” but it is not the easy course. For this to work, couples must first master the skills outlined above, especially these four:

1. They must be able to stand in place in the face of emotional heat, listen and not WAD.
2. They must be able to [fight by the rules](#), fairly.
3. Couples must be on-going in maintaining a clear sense of their own identity and not get in the way of their partner’s self-development or projects.
4. They must regularly touch and talk and make sure they have scheduled time for both.

Putting it all together, here is the one key thing couples do to sustain a deep, intimate and fun relationship over time, through the good and the bad and everything else in between:

**[Regularly Negotiate Compromises They Both Can Live With and Move On](#)**

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## Conclusion

Getting married is easy. Many do it. Staying married with respect and dignity is a difficult matter of choosing to learn the necessary interpersonal skills and then doing the work of practicing them regularly.

If you wish to live the rest of your days into your “Happily Ever-After,” choose to love and respect your spouse despite your differences. Embrace each other’s flaws, accepting them as whole persons, not just the parts you like. Bodies can deteriorate with time, but feelings won’t if you add fuel to your fire. Keep your marriage healthy. Be the exception. Use and mature relational skill sets that work.

Invite your partner to join you and be part of a bridge building team, a project you both can work on together. Don’t make each other your private, lonely project.

PS. Don’t be afraid to ask for help and then use it.



About

## Paul W Anderson, PhD

I have been in private practice as a family psychologist and executive coach for over 30 years. Prior to that I worked in corporate management positions.

As a child growing up overseas, I experienced the need to study and develop skills useful to enter and join diverse groups and cultures. After completing a Masters degree in sociology and teaching college for several years, I went back to school for the PhD in counseling psychology. I wanted a more close and personal involvement with people, marriages and family relationships which the classroom did not afford.

Two things characterized my practice:

- a strategic, solution focused perspective which
- takes context, particularly interpersonal dynamics, into account.

With this practical systemic approach, I work with people, couples and corporate management teams to develop solutions which not only give them the successes they want and sustain those achievements.

It is often assumed that when a goal is achieved it will be sustained. My experience is the opposite. Being successful is easy compared to the challenge of sustaining that success. A large part of my expertise is helping people be successful with their goals in a way that maintains those goals once achieved.

I provide the context and skill sets for couples and marriages to build bridges between angry wives and cold husbands, develop communication skills which reduce conflict and escalating tension, recover trust lost due to trauma, including infidelity and help people in recovery manage addictions such as substance abuse, sex and emotional abuse.

I enable corporate executives to:

- manage business and work stress
- regain a balance between work and home life
- manage and enhance their careers despite given obstacles and challenges

I work with corporate management and executive teams to unravel human snarls that lead to low productivity.

## Resources

Counseling/Coaching with Paul W Anderson, PhD

Contact points: [Website](#) - [email](#) - 913-991-2302

[“Couples Are Sharing Things They Do Together That Aren't "Normal," And It's Shockingly Wholesome”](#)

[Information and assessment tests about interpersonal skills](#)

[Compromise Made Simple: 7 Handy Tips for Couples](#)

**END**