

Long marriage brings insight into successful unions

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Over the years I have observed many different forms of marriage. On one occasion my wife and I were visiting the Taj Mahal in Agra, India. A young Hindu couple had just come from their marriage service to have their wedding pictures taken at the Taj Mahal. As they awaited the arrival of the photographer I asked how long they had known each other. The new husband and wife smiled nervously and explained that they had first met each other just twenty minutes prior to their wedding service. They went on to describe, in a courteous and enthusiastic way that pre-arranged marriages were the normal custom in India. They assured us that such marriages generally worked out well. Commitments to both the bride and the groom are made to unite the two extended families in supporting their marriage. It was as though they were marrying into each other's families, and divorces were rare compared to American and Canadian style unions.

My wife and I were married in a Christian church sixty years ago and we are fortunate to have remained happily married. Some attribute the success of our partnership to our Christian marriage, but we are aware that the divorce rate for our type of marriage is indeed about 40%. Today, there are many kinds of marriages performed in Christian churches, including same sex marriages, open marriages, contractual agreements dividing up money and property, and those that divide obligations toward children born in other unions. Of course many of these options were not available sixty years ago. Today such a variety of marriages is accepted in some Christian denominations, but not in others.

Perhaps Canadians can improve our success rate for marriages. I suggest this with some hesitation and speak only as one who has been happily married to the same person for sixty years. Here are some ideas that grew out of those experiences.

- * A marriage is helped when the parents of both partners know and respect each other.
- * Marriages are likely to be more successful when couples, prior to their wedding, share their opinions on important matters. Do they both want to have children? Will they have joint bank accounts? Will the new mother want to return to work after the children are in school?
- * When disagreements develop, discussing things in a respectful and kindly tone can hasten resolutions.
- * Partners may have a few activities they enjoy alone, but marriages can benefit by pursuing many activities they enjoy together.
- * Mutual respect and a sense of equality are crucial. Even when partners participate in differing tasks, each should acknowledge the value of their partner's contributions and interests.
- * Income earned by one partner should be balanced by the contributions of the other, whether through money, household tasks, child care, gardening, maintenance of property, etc. It helps when partners agree on worthwhile objectives and on positive and constructive ways to use money and time.
- * One has to like someone before they can love them, and love can grow quickly or mature over time.
- * Disagreements are resolved more by listening than by talking the most or the loudest. Arguments are more likely to be solved through patience and understanding.
- * Tell your partner what you like about them...how they dress, look, or accomplish worthwhile tasks. This can be a way of telling them why and how you love them.
- * Take time to recognize and celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and other special occasions.

* Respect your partner's opinions even when they differ from yours. It helps to talk calmly about such differences. Don't be anxious if you don't come to immediate agreement. It takes time to incorporate others' views.

*Where there are children resulting from a marriage it is important that parents work together in supporting and raising their children. Children are often quick to notice when each parent sets differing boundaries or expectations for proper behavior.

* Kindness, gentleness and patience enhance the success of marriages whether they are based on Christianity, other religions, or on secular humanistic principles.

There are many kinds of partnerships, but the rewards that can come from a happy marriage far outweigh those of other partnerships.