

Predicting Marital Success

By Theo Selles

This “Top Ten” list should be helpful to anyone planning to walk down the aisle again. If you’re currently separated, it might also help you to understand why your relationship didn’t last.

- 1) Commonality and appreciation of differences.

Feeling that you have similar thoughts, feelings, backgrounds and future goals helps build a sense of companionship. But two people aren’t going to think and feel the same way all the time: the types of differences and the degree to which people are curious about and appreciative of these differences can predict marital success.

- 2) The ability to talk about issues.

Eventually, you’re going to need to talk about issues such as spirituality, sexuality, parenting, politics, or work. Are these issues you can openly discuss with your partner or do you tend to avoid them?

- 3) Having your own life.

Successful marriages tend to be composed of two people who rely on each other but do not totally depend on each other. You, not your partner (or your child), are responsible for your happiness. Don’t get married so that he/she will make you happy! Doing so will almost inevitably lead to feelings of disappointment and resentment.

- 4) Absence of violence and control.

Each person in a relationship has the need and the right to feel safe and free from any financial, physical, emotional, verbal abuse and control. If you’re afraid to be yourself within reasonable negotiated limits because of how your partner will respond, then you are likely being controlled. If you find yourself attempting to make your partner think, feel, or act the way you want her or him to be, then you are likely being controlling.

- 5) Equal Investment in the relationship.

Both partners equally value the relationship and are equally committed to doing whatever it takes (including performing an equal share of household chores) to maintain and enrich it.

- 6) “Fair fighting”.

Fair fighting is neither hurtful blaming and attacking nor avoidance of conflict. You should enjoy feel safe standing up for yourself in a relationship without fear of hurting

your partner or being hurt yourself. An avoidance of conflict can lead to feelings of distrust, indifference, and lack of passion.

7) The ability to communicate needs, thoughts and feelings.

Communication includes listening: people need to feel heard and understood. A mutual ability to express and listen to both thoughts and feelings increases the likelihood that both people will have their needs met in the relationship.

8) A support network.

Surviving the world on your own can be done, but it can put quite a strain on a relationship. Friends and family can provide various types of help or support. Just “getting away from each other” to spend time with others can help people regain perspective (a nice way of saying “maintaining your sanity”). Remember: no one person can meet all of your needs.

9) An absence of addictions.

Just about anything can become an addiction if performing the action becomes out of control or out of balance with the rest of your life. Drugs, gambling, sex, and work are some of the more well known addictions. Internet addiction is a new one to be aware of. Addictions are problematic for a number of reasons – including that they look more important to the addict than his or her relationships.

10) Love and the ability to show it.

Contrary to what many soon-to-be-wed couples think, love is not enough. You must be able to demonstrate this love in such a manner that your partner actually *feels* loved. Each person in a relationship interprets love in his/her own way. Remember to check in with your partner about what she or he needs to have from you to feel loved.

Theo Selles, a Clinical member of the Ontario Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, operates a private marriage and family therapy practice in Port Perry.

Divorce Spring 1997