2ND TIME AROUND

5 First Marriage Tribulations

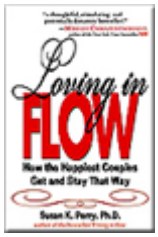
You can learn from now that you're in your second

by Susan K. Perry, Ph.D.

You didn't get married the first time thinking it was going to be a trial or starter marriage. Of course not. It was going to last forever. But, like half of all marriages, it didn't. When you're ready to re-enter the relationship game, the smart thing to do is pick apart your first marriage for all the information you can gather (assuming, of course, that you're divorced, not widowed). That way you improve the odds of not having the same problems all over again with a new mate.

Feeling queasy at the thought of looking closely at what went wrong, at the part you might have contributed? Then you're probably not yet ready to start dating seriously again.

HERE IS WHAT YOU CAN LEARN FROM A MARRIAGE THAT ENDED IN DIVORCE:



1. Dealing with conflict is a learning process. Let's say that as your relationship grew strained, your mate yelled at you sometimes. Did you yell back? If he called you names or slammed a door, did you escalate the conflict by screaming even louder? Keeping calm when the other person is over-excited makes it possible to keep working on problems. Or leave the room for ten minutes. Never in the history of the world has escalating the decibel level helped anyone to get back in touch with loving feelings.

2. Every couple is made up of two very different people. Even though you may have grown apart during your first marriage, remember that you started out feeling close and connected. Yet all the differences that later tore you apart where there at the start – if you'd been paying attention. When you're ready to try again, you'll probably find someone who seems perfect, or nearly so. Soon, though, the differences will begin showing, and how you manage those differences is what's going to decide the longevity of this new relationship.

3. Everyone has sensitivities, and only bullies use their mates' to make a point. The trick is recognizing what those sensitivities are and then avoiding them like the plague. I once had a loud disagreement with my first husband in which we were discussing whether or not I should go back to work before our kids were school-age. I hollered at him, "Money's not important!" Not until I saw his devastated look did I realize how deeply I'd cut him, how very important it was to him that we plan for our financial future. If I'd been more sensitive, I could have found a kinder way to express my own strongly held values.

4. No one likes to be taken for granted. The more you pay attention to someone, the more they tend to glow and grow. Did you allow your first marriage to wither because you were too busy to notice small changes in your mate? Were you too busy to put intimacy and sex near the top of your list of things to do? Did you make your own needs known early enough and in a pleasant way so your mate could tune in before you got too resentful and angry?

5. Hardly anything is all one person's fault. It's a common mistake to give ourselves lots of leeway and give our spouse very little. Look back at your first marriage and search for times when maybe you could have been a little more compassionate or forgiving. Or maybe your mate was the inflexible one. Did you have cues for that behavior early on?

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