

Managing Your Budget and Your Marriage The Key to a Healthy Relationship

The current economic deficit has placed a significant strain on our wallets, our jobs, but most importantly, our relationships. Divorce rates are an unsettling 51% today, which means half of all marriages are ending in separation. What is even more disturbing is that out of the couples getting divorced, approximately 80% of them attribute their failed marriage to disputes over finances. While these statistics may seem daunting, there is hope. There are ways to reduce the burden that financial difficulty has on marriage, and by enacting some of these techniques, your marriage will have a better chance for success.

“No one plans to fail, they just fail to plan.”

The most important thing to remember when forming a marriage is that planning for the future is crucial. Even couples who are already married should work to develop and improve their plan over time. A well-constructed plan should include expectations like the following:

Develop a weekly and yearly budget

Work together to reduce costs (i.e., energy efficiency, stop needless spending, cooking instead of going out, etc.)

Have a shared future goal

Set a target amount to save each month

Saving money for the future is the best way to prepare against financial hardships that may arise. For example, if one of you were to need time off from work for some unexpected reason, it can be a much easier to manage if you have a well stocked savings account. One way to making saving more fun is to plan a reward for each other in the event of reaching the target amount. Take time together to have a goal, whether it would be to save enough money to take a vacation, or set aside money for that new family car, and stick with it. Then, upon reaching your goal, celebrate with a nice dinner or some other outing where you can enjoy spending time together.

Plans for future children should also be incorporated when developing a budget. A middle class household with two primary caregivers will spend an average of \$291,570 in childcare; and that is just from infancy until the age of 18. That means a significant percentage of your savings must be dedicated to raising your child before even considering an addition to the family. Preparing for children can help prevent additional strain on your marriage once you have decided to take that next step.

If you are a two-income household, being financially conservative and savvy means you will reap the financial benefits of being married. One of the wonderful benefits of marriage is when you have two people earning an income. Living off two incomes should provide you with more 'extra' money than a single person living off one income, especially if you are conservative in your approach. For example, set up your finances so you can pay all of your basic expenses (at least mortgage/rent, electric, phone, food, cable, one car) from one salary. This then leaves you another whole salary for investing, saving, vacations, hobbies, etc. This life plan also provides you with low-stress living around finances, and a great deal of freedom.

“Choose your target, aim, and fire away!”

If you're going to run a race, it is important to know where it ends; so when you start a project, there should be a goal. This concept can also be applied to marriage. Whether it is a short term or long term aspiration, there should be some financial objective. It could be anything from getting out of debt, to perhaps buying a new house. The most important aspect of creating a goal is to have a shared goal. As partners, you should always be open to the ambitions of your counterpart. Share ideas, develop a strategy to help you reach a common aim, and work towards it. For example, if the two of you decide to work together and save up for a house, it is more likely that each of you will do your own part in reducing expenditures, finding the best price, and taking on extra work to accommodate for the necessary costs.

“Life's little pleasures come with BIG bills.”

“It's not that much.” You may find yourself saying something like this when you find that perfect dress or new television, but those expenses add up. Couples seem to have the problem of buying those “just for me” toys and things that come with a hefty bill. Expenses like this can take a significant chunk of your accounts without knowing it. The problem with all of these purchases is that they only serve one partner. One of you may buy a fishing pole while the other gets a new purse. With two people pulling money for entertainment, the budget can easily become ignored. One solution to this problem is to, instead of each of you buying something, purchase something that both of you will be able to use and enjoy. Buy tickets to an upcoming show that both of you like instead of costly gifts for yourself. This also improves the quality time you have for each other because you are sharing in something you both enjoy.

“Living on credit is living in insanity.”

Don't live beyond your means. Period. Many people find this easier said than done in a credit card society. Yet high debt leads to high anxiety, which takes its toll on a marriage, and debt is a house of cards waiting to collapse. Adopt a conservative approach to credit as follows. Limit loans to a home, car, and/or college tuition, and keep those reasonable (a great hint: always buy a good bit less than the bank says you can afford); and only have one car payment at a time between the two of you. For all other items, only buy things you have money for on hand. Read that last sentence again, because much of American society has forgotten to live that way. For example, if you plan to buy concert tickets or new clothes or a vacation and pay it off over a few

months of credit card payments... you can't afford it. Unless you can write a check covering the full cost of an item, it is at that moment beyond your means. Use your credit card for the convenience of not carrying a bulky check book, or to get frequent flier miles, but never put anything on it that you cannot pay in full when the bill comes. Save money for the higher cost items you want, then buy them when you have the money. That is the lost art of living within your means.

"It's all your fault!"

Everyone has experienced that all too familiar argument over who has been frivolously spending money. "Well, you bought those new shoes," or "You didn't even need a coat, why did you spend so much?" It is all the same. When we find ourselves in a tight spot for money, it can be tempting to start the blame game. This can produce some serious tension in a marriage, causing feelings of resentment and anger. The first step to solving your financial problems is to stop dividing your team, and instead work together to solve the issue together. Marriage is wonderful for a reason: You don't have to struggle alone to solve your problems.

"Talk, talk, talk..."

When was the last time you and your spouse sat down together and discussed plans for the future? When did you last open up about budgeting concerns or something you wanted for your household but couldn't get it due to financial shortcomings? Now is the best time to share your thoughts and concerns. Talk about advancement opportunities at work, talk vacation plans, and talk about the future. If you do not open up to your partner about these issues, you can become isolated and uncertain of your partner's concerns. Open communication allows you to share your burden and deal with it together.

In some cases, therapy may be the most beneficial method of opening this line of communication between you and your spouse. Couples therapy is a useful tool which can help you strengthen the bond you share with your loved ones. Lepage Associates offers caring, licensed psychologists to help your marriage flourish. The comfortable environment at Lepage Associates is perfect for breaking down walls that divide both new and weathered couples. We can help you design a budget and plan for the future, moving at a pace which best suits you. With advice from our friendly staff, you can feel secure knowing that you have taken a step in the right direction to a happier, more successful marriage with your partner.

References

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