

# Mastering Marriage: What Men Need to Know

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My wife and I have been happily married for almost 28 years. We thought it might be useful to share some tried-and-true rules that we've discovered in our own marriage and in working with hundreds of couples over the years in marital counseling. Part 1 will focus on what men need to know and Part 2 will flip the coin to examine what women need to learn.

Here are a few simple rules that all married men must practice:

**1. THE ART OF THE PARADOXICAL APOLOGY.** Learn to apologize for your misbehavior without a trace of insincerity whether or not you believe you've done anything wrong. Remember: If she thinks she deserves an apology, she does! Your sincerity will be judged by your ability to demonstrate an understanding of (a) what you've done wrong; (b) how it has affected your partner; and (c) why you'll burn in hell before you'll ever do it again.

**2. THE ART OF DODGING.** Your wife buys a "new" pair of \$220 designer jeans that come shredded and splattered with white paint drops. Upon trying them on for you, she inquires as to whether her hips look too big. Your answer is: "You look great to me!" If she persists, you must successfully dodge giving a disparaging remark. The artful dodge is aimed at avoiding a lie by skirting the issue. Understand that your wife is probably not looking for the truth – she is looking for a compliment. There is a time and place for telling the truth about important issues – your wife asking about her fit in jeans is not one of them. Practice artful dodging responses in front of a mirror, perfecting your enthusiasm and sincerity.

Consider this sobering thought: The divorce battlefield is strewn with formerly well-to-do men who held the misguided notion they need never tell a white lie. These lost souls can now be found scattered about in one-bedroom apartments in the Riverside vicinity, driving mechanically challenged '97 Ford Escorts.

**3. ARTFUL GENEROSITY.** Your wife wants to buy the shredded jeans with the paint spots. You know they are a shameless rip-off and that there is something absurd about the direct relationship between the jeans' degree of "distress" and their cost. But you encourage her to buy them without a word of complaint. Then she has to have a new pair of Porsche Design sunglasses. Again, you encourage her to buy them and remind her, "If buying these things makes you happy, it makes me happy." Bear in mind, making her materially content must fit within the guidelines of your family budget.

**4. THE CONSIDERATE APPROACH.** If you want physical affection and sex, start by taking out the garbage. If you think I'm kidding, ask your wife. You want to show her that you're thinking of her by trying to make her life easier. You're demonstrating she doesn't have to ask you – that you are anticipating her every little mundane need. When you do a thoughtful task without being asked, you'll find that she's more receptive to your affections.

**5. THE ART OF KICKIN' BACK.** You wish to spend evening time with your wife. She suggests cozying up on the couch or in your bed watching TV together. She likes reality shows that you can't stand. Your job is to learn to be with her attentively and even tenderly, but have your mind a thousand miles away. You may be thinking about work, your golf swing, or where you will go for a real meal once she comes off the diet. Your task here is to watch just enough of the show to be able to say things like, "Yes, dear, that cute bachelorette looks like she might win all the marbles" or "Fascinating, don't you think, how those Survivor women are backstabbing each other?" and yet still be able to ponder what matters: whether Phil Jackson's Lakers will ever manage to regain their former supremacy.

**6. THE ART OF GRACIOUSLY GIVING CREDIT.** Never forget that your wife is your shining light and guiding inspiration. She is responsible for every major and minor accomplishment you have ever been fortunate enough to enjoy – even the ones that occurred before you met her. By the way, my wife Deborah should be given all credit for this column and for everything good and decent that I have ever managed to achieve in my life.