



Marriage Rules: A Manual for the Married and the Coupled Up

By Harriet Lerner

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Coupling up is complicated—Dr. Harriet Lerner’s marriage rules are not.

This marriage book provides couple’s therapy in a unique format perfect for today’s world. The renowned author of *The Dance of Anger* gives readers more than one hundred rules that cover all the hot spots in long-term relationships.

Marriage Rules offers new relationship advice to age-old problems (“He won’t talk”/“She doesn’t want sex”) as well as modern ones (your partner’s relationship to technology). If one person in a couple follows ten rules of his or her choice, it will generate a major, positive change. All that’s required is a genuine wish for a better relationship and a willingness to practice.

Marriage Rules is a treasure chest of lively, practical advice to help you navigate your relationships issues with clarity, courage, and joyous conviction.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This is the marriage book we've been waiting for!"

—Brené Brown, Ph.D., LMSW, bestselling author of *The Gifts of Imperfection* and *Daring Greatly*

"Required reading for anyone hoping to interact successfully with any other human."

—Martha Beck, author of *Leaving the Saints*

"If you're asking the question, "But what do I DO?" this book is for you. *Marriage Rules* is wise, gripping, funny, sanity-saving and above all, useful. It's brimming with Lerner's warmth, sharp wit, remarkable clarity, and practical advice."

—Edward M. Hallowell, M.D. author of *Driven to Distraction*

"This book is an astonishing blend of down-home wisdom and clinical experience. I can't think of a better comprehensive guide to making marriage work for today's couples. Read it for your own relationship and give it to every newlywed you know."

—William J. Doherty, Ph.D., professor at the University of Minnesota and author of *Take Back Your Marriage*

"Don't be fooled by this book's simplicity: Lerner, a distinguished psychologist, offers a real-life roadmap for a healthy relationship. She is an outstanding guide, accompanying us on the hard moments of the journey while escorting us firmly in the direction of love and joy and wisdom."

—Pat Love, co-author of *How to Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It*

"Open this book anywhere and you'll find a rule that will rescue you from the swamps and quicksands of marriage and couplehood. What a beautiful, smart, witty and eminently helpful book!"

—Janis Abrahms Spring, Ph.D., author of *After the Affair*

About the Author

Harriet Lerner, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist whose many acclaimed books, including *The Dance of Anger* and the upcoming *Why Won't You Apologize*, have topped six million copies in combined sales. She is a dynamic, sought-after speaker who has appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, CNN, and NPR, and she hosts *The Dance of Connection* blog on psychologytoday.com.

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INTRODUCTION

IT SHOULDN'T BE THAT COMPLICATED

People spend their hard-earned money seeking the advice of relationship experts when they already know what they need to do to have a good marriage—or at least a better one. I was recently reminded of this fact when listening to the marriage vows that two young people said out loud to each other in front of their community of family and friends.

They said in turn:

I promise to always treat you with kindness and respect.

I promise to be faithful, honest, and fair.

I promise to listen carefully to what you are saying.

I promise to apologize when I am wrong and to repair any harm I have done.

I promise to cook and clean for you.

I promise to be your partner and best friend in the best and worst of times.

I promise to bring my best self into our relationship.

I promise to live these promises as a daily practice.

How do you think this couple came up with their shared promises? Did they plow through the countless self-help books and blogs about the “how-tos” of a successful relationship? Did they consult the work of psychologists and marriage counselors and study the latest research on marital failure and success?

Of course not. They consulted their own hearts, their core values, their life experience, and the Golden Rule. By the time we're old enough to choose a life partner, we've observed a number of marriages and have a pretty good idea about what makes things better and worse. We know it's usually a good idea to treat the other person as we'd like to be treated. If this couple lives their promises as a daily practice (even with a large margin of error), their marriage will do very well, indeed. Need the experts say more?

OK, IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE

With marriage having a 50 percent no-go rate, it's obvious that people don't follow their promises, or their best thinking, just like people don't eat healthfully even when they know what's good for them. Paradoxically, it's in our most enduring and important relationships that we're least likely to be our most mature and thoughtful selves.

Real life is messy and complicated. When we share a living space with another person, tie our finances together, negotiate sexuality and the countless decisions that daily life demands—well, of course things can go badly. Then there's the baggage we bring from our first family, and all the unresolved issues of the past, to say nothing of all the stresses that pile up as we move along the life cycle. If we make or adopt a baby (never mind adding stepchildren to the picture), it's more difficult still because nothing is harder on a marriage than the addition or subtraction of a family member. In fact, it amazes me that all marriages don't fly apart by the baby's first birthday.

THE FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT RESPONSE

The older I get, the more humble I am about marriage. When anxiety spirals high enough, and lasts long enough, even the most mature relationship may begin to look like a dysfunctional one. To paraphrase the novelist Mary Karr, a dysfunctional marriage is any marriage that has more than one person in it.

I always remind my readers that even the best marriages get stuck in too much distance, too much intensity, and too much pain. Our automatic tendency toward fight or flight is hardwired, and marriage is a lightning rod that absorbs anxiety and intensity from every source. In case you haven't noticed, stress will always be with us.

Life is one thing after another, so it's normal for married folks to yo-yo back and forth between conflict (fight response) and distance (flight response). And just because the universe hands you one gigantic stress, it doesn't mean that it won't hit you with others while you're down. So your mother's health is deteriorating, your dog dies, your son drops out of drug treatment, and your husband is laid off — all in the same year.

Unless you are a saint or a highly evolved Zen Buddhist, intimacy with your partner may be the first thing to go,

ARE YOU MOTIVATED TO HAVE A BETTER MARRIAGE?

The rules ahead may look simple, but it is difficult to make a change and especially challenging to maintain it over time. With marriage, as with learning a language or establishing an exercise routine, nothing is more important than motivation.

To put the marriage rules into practice, you'll need to have

1. goodwill and a genuine wish to create a better marriage.
2. an openness to focusing on your self (not self blame but rather the capacity to observe and change your own steps in a pattern that is bringing you pain).
3. a willingness to engage in bold acts of change.
4. a willingness to practice, practice, practice.

Anything worth doing requires practice, and having a good marriage does too.

One can practice choosing happiness over the need to be right or to always win the argument. One can practice playfulness, generosity, and openness. One can practice having both a strong voice and a light touch. One can practice calming things down and warming them up even when the other person is behaving badly. One can practice taking a firm position on things that matter— a position that is not negotiable under relationship pressures.

It helps to know the rules, which you might prefer to think of as pretty good ideas to consider. Sometimes we just need to be reminded of our own common sense. At other times imagination and *uncommon* sense are required to see an old problem from a new angle. So, take a look at these suggestions and see whether you might be inspired to try something new. It's fine to start small. Small, positive changes have a way of morphing into more generous, expansive ones. Your relationship thanks you in advance.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Shannon Harvey:

Do you have favorite book? For those who have, what is your favorite's book? Reserve is very important thing for us to find out everything in the world. Each publication has different aim as well as goal; it means that guide has different type. Some people sense enjoy to spend their a chance to read a book. They are really reading whatever they consider because their hobby is usually reading a book. What about the person who don't like reading through a book? Sometime, individual feel need book after they found difficult problem or even exercise. Well, probably you'll have this Marriage Rules: A Manual for the Married and the Coupled Up.

Alice Christensen:

The actual book Marriage Rules: A Manual for the Married and the Coupled Up will bring someone to the new experience of reading a book. The author style to describe the idea is very unique. In case you try to find

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