

# GLUING A MARRIAGE BACK TOGETHER

Many unhappy spouses contemplate divorce this time of year, but there are a lot of reasons why they should reconsider

By ANNE-LOUISE DePALO

**T**he start of the new year is a wonderful time. After the hustle and bustle of Christmas and New Year's Eve partying, there is this period of calm that gives us the chance to take stock of our lives, examine our goals and resolve that this is the year to make our dreams a reality.

However, there can also be a dark side to this desire to start anew, especially for couples who are not completely satisfied with their marriages. While reflecting on what they need to change to make their lives better, some spouses may start to believe that most of their discontent comes from their husband or wife and that the best solution is to get a divorce.

In fact, a number of couples seem to think along these lines during this time of year. According to divorce attorneys, January is the month when they receive the most inquiries about filing for divorce.

For some couples, divorce is undoubtedly the only viable solution. However, others may be jumping the gun, wanting a quick fix to their problems without **making** a real effort to solve them first, and not

considering the serious **consequences** of such a decision.

If your New Year's resolution has you **considering** a change in your marital status, before you throw in the towel, why not first resolve to try to turn your marriage around? The best way to start is by **examining** why your relationship is **falling** apart.

According to a recent study by David Olson and John **DeFrain**, authors of "**Marriage and Family, Diversity and Strengths**," the top five reasons marriages fail are: infidelity; no longer in love; emotional **prob-**

SEE GLUING, PAGE C 5



# Make an effort to turn your marriage around

in love; emotional problems; financial problems and sexual problems.

Additionally, Philip A. Garippa, a board certified diplomate and an individual, marital and sex therapist with a practice in Oakwood, identifies other death knells for a marriage as when one spouse only takes and the other constantly gives, and when couples' personalities are not well-matched.

"Differences in sexual needs, the way one views the world, interests and energy levels breed conflict," Garippa said. "The more conflict in a relationship, the less likely [it is that] the couple will be happy."

And let's not forget that marriage is just plain hard.

"Marriage is now and has always been hard work," said Natalie Low, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and instructor at Harvard University, who also counsels families about marriage.

"Marriage is not a static event that can be measured, but a series of developments — those triumphs and setbacks — that make up life," said the psychologist, who herself has been married 51 years. "There are dramatic changes during a marriage so a couple has to be committed to a way of life."

Martin Blondell, a licensed clinical social worker with a practice in Great Kills, believes couples have to overcome unrealistic expectations. "There is a difference between being 'in love' and loving your spouse," he said. When the fireworks wane, which is normal, the marriage should be based on a relationship of mutuality, friendship, respect and commitment."

## REGRETTING DIVORCE

Figures from The National Survey of Families and Households would appear to bear that out: 85 percent of people who described themselves as unhappily married when they were first polled in the late '80s stated that their marriage was happier than they had believed when surveyed again five years later.

So, a rush to divorce should be avoided if there is any chance that a marriage can be saved, William J. Doherty suggests in the 2002 study "Does Divorce Make People Happy?" findings from a Study of Unhappy Marriages" in which he cites two polls. The first, a New Jersey poll, found that 46 percent of divorced people said they wished they and their ex-spouses had tried harder to work through their differences.

The second, conducted in Australia, indicates that of people who divorce, "one-



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Though the idea of a happy marriage may seem like only a shadow today, tomorrow may be a different story. In fact, figures from The National Survey of Families and Households show that 85 percent of people who described themselves as unhappily married when they were first polled stated that their marriage was happier than they had believed when surveyed again five years later.

third regrets the decision five years later. Of the individuals involved, two out of five [40 percent] believe their divorce could have been avoided!"

The research clearly would suggest that married couples fare better than their unmarried counterparts. In the book "Why Marriage Matters" (Navpress Publishing Group) Glenn T. Stanton illustrates through interviews and surveys that married couples are healthier, physically and mentally, live longer and enjoy a more fulfilled life, and take better care of themselves (and each other).

## SAVING THE MARRIAGE

"Communication is key," said Dr. Sara Weiss, director of Heartland Psychological in New Springville, of priorities in saving a marriage. She suggests couples' counseling for those whose marriages are in danger "so resentment and anger do not continue to grow and ultimately destroy the relationship."

Garippa agrees that working on your communication skills, as well as developing new ways of interacting, are imperative to creating a healthy marriage.

"I tell couples it is not about being right," he said. "Power struggles can kill a relationship."

Garippa mentions three healthy ways of negotiating differences: finding a creative solution, compromising and give-and-take.

So, if one spouse wants to go skiing and the other surfing, a creative solution would be for them to visit Paris instead. A compromise might be as simple as if the wife, say, suggests dinner and a movie out, and the husband agrees to dinner out and renting a movie. When it comes to give-and-take, if she wants to see "La Boheme" on Saturday night and he agrees to go even though he has no interest in opera, he can feel free to go golfing with his buddies on Sunday.

## EXPRESS APPRECIATION

Keith and Maura Leon, Los Angeles-based relationship experts, life coaches and co-authors of "The Seven Steps to Successful Relationships," believe that expressing and demonstrating appreciation and focusing on the things you love about your spouse are key for a satisfying and happy relationship.

Mrs. Leon shares that "Keith writes love notes and hides them all over the house. I can't tell you how it makes me feel when I find one of them and I see how much he appreciates and loves me."

In fact, the power of this practice has become so significant in the couple's coaching and counseling that they have set up a Web site called [www.onemillionlovenotes.com](http://www.onemillionlovenotes.com), where love notes can be posted and retrieved by loved ones.

The two also advocate practicing "conflict prevention." It goes like this: Reflect back what you believe your partner has said without interruption, ask if your interpretation is correct, find a resolution and end with an expression of appreciation.

Mr. Leon insists that when it comes to appreciation, "the only rule is that whatever you say in your love notes or tell your spouse is true."

The pair also emphasizes that every relationship people have is a reflection of themselves and what they are doing right or wrong.

So, as you take stock of your life and make resolutions to make it better, where your marriage is concerned, you might want to check your reflection in the mirror, think about your own role in the breakdown and decide whether the two of you can still work to make each other happy.

Anne-Louise DePalo is a freelance writer. She may be contacted via Elise McIntosh at [mcintosh@siadvance.com](mailto:mcintosh@siadvance.com).