



WHAT MAKES MARRIAGE LAST?

What's the secret to a lasting *and* happy marriage? It depends on whom you ask. Love, commitment, good communication, hard work—everyone has her point of view.

In his book *Will Our Love Last? A Couple's Road Map*, clinical psychologist and marital therapist Sam R. Hamburg, Ph.D. presents his ideas on the defining factors behind good and lasting marriages.

COMPATIBILITY

"The key to having a happy marriage is to choose the right person for you in the first place. That person is someone with whom you are deeply compatible," says Dr. Hamburg. Couples who enjoy long-lasting relationships tend to be compatible in 3 important ways:

- practical dimension—tastes, personal habits, priorities, approach to day-to-day life, interests
- sexual dimension
- wavelength dimension—outlook; attitudes; being "on the same page" for most of the big issues, like what is and what is not important in life

Compatibility sets the stage for continuous mutual understanding and affirmation of each other, which foster lasting love. Compatible couples respect each other, and in times of strife, are able to say, "I can see how you could feel that way."

SHE SAYS TOMATO, HE SAYS ...

"You and your partner don't have to be clones of each other to be compatible," says Dr. Hamburg. But the 3 key compatibility components give a marriage a better chance for happiness and duration.

For example, if a couple's approach to daily living is very different, there will always be little issues to negotiate. Irritations and annoyances can build up over time, providing a continual source of marital stress. If you agree on most things, however, your marriage is on more solid ground.

CONFLICT

Marital conflict is inevitable, no matter how happy and healthy the marriage. When people marry for the wrong reasons, however, Dr. Hamburg believes the marriage has little chance of survival, let alone true happiness.

Couples who are incompatible lack the capacity to really understand how each other can think, feel or be a certain way. Because compatibility is based on what makes you you and what makes your spouse your spouse, the only way for a marriage to survive major incompatibilities is to find ways of coping with and tolerating their irreconcilable differences. Many couples find this difficult or impossible.

Many marital conflicts, however, stem from reasons other than incompatibility. Issues like financial trouble, family tragedy, personal (rather than relationship) problems (e.g., alcoholism, self-esteem issues) can seriously challenge a marriage. Counseling and self-help books can help married couples work through such issues.

Dr. Hamburg also stresses the importance of good communication and conflict resolution skills to negotiating the bumps in the road. Couples who work to improve these skills will enhance their marriage by reducing unnecessary conflict and stress.