



Daily Romance: Tips for Keeping the Love Alive, Part 1

By Jonathan D. Sherman, LMFT

Valentine's Day is just around the corner. Go ahead and plan a special day. While you are at it resolve this year to infuse romance into your daily relationship. While women can definitely benefit from implementing the concept of daily romance, women tend to be more mindful of relationship issues already. Thus, this article is written specifically for men to help give men that "edge" in their relationships that can set them apart from the rest of the pack.

My mission is to teach men and women the keys for developing deep and meaningful relationships that transcend the mundane and commonplace. Over the years I have counseled and interviewed hundreds and hundreds of men and women. If "knowing is half the battle" and "knowledge is power," then let me share the inside scoop from what I have learned from these couples. This two-part series is written to be a helpful toolbox men can select from as they need it. Some may need this more than others. Men understand the difference having the right tool for the right job can make. Men also understand the difference between junk tools and high-end tools. Well, here are some of the Snap-Ons of relationship tools.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE: DON'T RECREATE THE WHEEL, EXPAND UPON IT.

One husband I was working with and I were joking that wouldn't it be nice if there was a "Husband's Field Guide to Women, Wives and Marriage for the Well-Intentioned but Clueless." This book would be full of tools, tips, advise and techniques that *really* work. We contemplated the riches and fame such a handy book would bring us. Through the course of our work together in their marriage he and I would give each approach that worked an imaginary chapter name and page number for future reference. While we are nowhere near having such a book completed, consider the following a "preliminary draft." These ideas are the culmination of my own and other's struggles to move from clueless to informed. They have been field tested and time and time again they work. Hope they help.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION: TIPS FOR KEEPING THE LOVE ALIVE.

Love is a behavior. Love as a feeling can be powerful and meaningful, but love as a behavior goes the distance. Daily acts of love are what really count. This is simply basic maintenance. We maintain our cars, yards and job skills with the understanding that if those things are not taken care of they will break down, get overgrown or we may get fired. Yet, too often, marriages are set in motion with little thought about ongoing maintenance and improvement. Romance in the big ways such as flowers, gifts and big surprises are nice. However, these are often few and far between. There is also the art of daily romance which is often more subtle, consistent, sublime and works to strengthen the very foundations of a marriage.

Doing the dishes is sexy. One of the best books I was exposed to early in my marriage was *Who Says It's a Woman's Job to Clean?!* by Don Aslett. What I learned there has enhanced the quality of my marriage time and time again. I learned that doing the dishes has little to do with doing the dishes. In my wife's eyes every time the dishes are done the way she prefers she feels helped. She also feels that I understand that her work in the home is just as important as my work outside the home. She feels appreciated. If there is any question about the power of appreciation, please see my article on appreciation at bardos.net/strongfamilies. So the dishes and other chores are not about chores. Dr. Kathleen Bahr taught, "The purpose of the task is to strengthen the relationship." Do the dishes, clean the toilet or take out the trash without being asked and without seeking praise for doing so. And do not do them just once and then rest on your laurels, but do them many times consistently. You may be surprised how many women find these simple acts more "sexy" and attractive than a dozen roses. Don't believe me? Ask ten women and report back to me. Romance, then, begins in the toilet as housework is romantic.

Conversation is sexy, too. Conversation, it has been said, is the greatest aphrodisiac. Keep the lines of



communication open. Talk and listen—even if it kills ya! And, women, tell your husband clearly (no hinting, mind-reading or expecting him to “just know” because he loves you) what you want and expect him to do. Then let him do it. Follow through with encouragement and appreciation instead of pointing out how he did not do it exactly right (e.g. your way).

Speaking of sex, understand what drives sex.

Understanding male and female points of view on sex is important as too these differences are overly stereotyped. While I cannot expound on these differences here, allow me to address one key difference. Generally speaking, men have sex to establish or to confirm an emotional connection. Conversely, women have sex because of an emotional connection that already exists. Neither way is the “right” way, but knowing this helps us look at sex and emotional intimacy in more effective ways. For example, when a man focuses on some of the suggestions in this article he is strengthening the emotional connection with his wife. Also, women need to understand that men do not just want sex as is too often stereotyped. They also want to be appreciated and feel close. By implementing these daily romance ideas both get more of what they want, and yes, because the emotional intimacy is strengthened the sex tends to improve as well.

Don’t hope. Decide. Do not waste your time passively hoping, wishing, wanting or dreaming that your marriage will get better. Decide that it will and make it happen. For a story that brilliantly illustrates this point can be read at bardos.net/dailyromance.

Send love mail. Send a postcard or a letter randomly for “no reason” “just because I was thinking about you.” Several of these a year expressing love and appreciation for your spouse are fun, touching and appreciated.

“No reason” is the best reason. Call and say, “I just called to say I was thinking about you and how grateful I am that you married me.” What a great reason to call. Can you think of a better reason to call your wife and the mother of your children? Let me know if you think of one, because I sure cannot. Doing something for “no special reason” is often the best and the most special reason as it communicates “you are in my thoughts and I like those thoughts.”

Give the gift of time. I do not recall what poet penned, “Rings and jewels are not gifts, but apologies

for gifts. The only true gift is a portion of one’s self.” The fact is we spend time on what is most important to us. We have day planners and PDAs to track our important commitments. Is there any more important commitment than that of husband to wife? Schedule dates with your wife. Really surprise her and you arrange the babysitter to boot. As an experiment track your wife’s schedule and daily tasks in your planner along with your own appointments to gain a deeper appreciation for what her day is like.

Don’t fix. Listen. Let your wife vent and complain about her day. It is natural and normal for men to seek to fix problems when they see them. However, restrain this urge to fix what you perceive as your wife’s problem. Allow her be frustrated, rant and/or rave as she needs to. You may be surprised that most of the time she will come up with a solution that is at least as good as yours and possibly even better. Someone once said, “Talking is sharing, but listening is caring.” Listening is a rare art and one that pays off big time.

Earn your bragging rights. One of my close friends told me once how he had gotten in trouble after his wife was talking to my wife. My wife had disclosed (bragged) how I help with the kids and household chores. He good naturedly bemoaned, “Man, you’re making me look bad here.” Since he is such a good friend I was able to genuinely say, without being condescending, “No, you’re making yourself look bad. You’re making me look good. Thanks!” We had a good laugh and talked about it for awhile. However, after that he began making himself “look good” more often. Doing these things earn “bragging rights.” We all know that women compare notes with each other. While the motivation needs to be to do it simply because it is the right thing to do, the fact is this is a very nice fringe benefit. We can capitalize on this as it feels great to be bragged about and it makes your wife feel great to be able to do so.

Make what’s important to her important to you. Because of the many differences between men and women as well as our own personalities and preferences we often do not see eye to eye on what is, or should be, important to each other. Adopt the phrase, “In of and of itself it’s not important to me. However, because this is important to her, and because she is important to me, I’ll make it important to me.” Listen, talk, share chores and childrearing not because you have simply out of duty. Follow Zig Ziglar’s statement that, “Duty makes us do things well, but love makes us do them beautifully.”



Watch for the next column where we will examine more ways to use daily romance as a means for creating greatness in your relationships. For more ways to infuse romance into your marriage visit bardos.net/dailyromance.

Daily Romance: Tips for Keeping the Love Alive, Part 2

By Jonathan D. Sherman, LMFT

Now that thoughtful gifts, good intentions and loving words of Valentine's Day have come and gone let's look at some ways to keep the good momentum going throughout the year. This is the second of a two part series of field-tested, tried and true strategies for being romantic on an ongoing basis that can transform a dull marriage into a good marriage and a good marriage into a great marriage. These principles and strategies increase appreciation, respect, admiration and love for each other. These approaches are all "win." Remember, even though these two articles are geared towards husbands many aspects apply to wives, too.

MORE GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS TO KEEP THE LOVE ALIVE

Keep a wish list. If it is hard for you to remember what your wife wants or likes keep a wish list in your planner or PDA. Whenever she says, "I like this" "I'd love one of those" or "This would be really helpful" discretely go write it down for future reference. Then when a special occasion arises you will know exactly what she wants. Do not be surprised if you hear, "Oh, you remembered!" Ka-ching! Now you are earning points. Keeping such a list communicates consideration that you care enough to make sure you remember what is important to her.

Continue courting. Show her the same attention you showed her when you were first dating. Be proud of her. Compliment her to others in front of her and behind her back. Compliment her clothes, hair and shoes. Refuse to criticize her, bad talk her or engage in wife-bashing jokes. For more ideas see "6 Ways of Woo" at bardos.net/dailyromance.

Really share in family work. We talk about equality in relationships, but the facts are we still have a long

way to go. In her groundbreaking research, as detailed in her book *The Second Shift*, Arlie Hochschild discovered that in two-income families women still do eighty-percent of the housework. So when you come home, be home. Help out not because you are helping your wife, but because it is your job, too. Even take over for your wife. This will "wow" and impress her immeasurably, especially when done consistently. One example of this is to take over the nighttime parenting. "Sounds great, but I need to get my sleep." So does your wife. If anyone is unclear about the amount of work a mom (whether a full-time at-home mom or a mom that also works outside the home) try this experiment. Take a full week off from work (seriously, some people have actually tried this) and the mom either continues her outside employment or engages in some other venture during the day. During this week the father must not only do the dishes, cleaning, laundry, nighttime parenting, shuttle service, homework assistance, conflict mediation and resolution, activity supervision and management, etc. but must also do so up to current standards. If you get the point without doing the experiment, fine. Now apply the point.

Fathers don't baby-sit. They parent. I take our four children with me wherever I go as I run errands. Frequently I hear, "Oh how nice of you to baby-sit your children for your wife." I respond kindly, but clearly, with, "Thank you. However, I'm not babysitting my children. I'm parenting them." They think I'm great. While I do appreciate the compliments, the fact is it bothers me. People see this behavior as unusual. This should be considered normal and expected behavior. A babysitter is a temporary, transitory person in a child's life, who leaves, who gets paid, and is not part of the child's life from birth on up. That is not me. I am my kids' dad. Again, fathers, you are not helping your wife out, you are pulling your own fair share as a co-



parent as well as getting the chance to develop relationships with your children.

Be true blue. Most of the women I talk with tend to be more security-conscious than men. Remind her over and over that not only is she wanted, but that she is needed, appreciated and attractive to you. Often use the words “I love you” “I like when you...” “Thank you for...” Refuse to take her for granted. Simply refuse. It may have happened, but I have yet to see a marriage fail where there is a commitment to use frequent and sincere expressions of appreciation and affection.

Learn from the masters. Ever notice how those silver-haired couples married for fifty plus years gaze into each other’s eyes as if they just fell in love? Don’t pass them by. Stop them and have them teach you how they did it. You may be surprised how many will be happy to share their secrets with total strangers. I know. I have gotten some of my best ideas and inspirations from such encounters with those who have mastered the art of the life-long marriage.

Plan dates. Tell your wife “We’re going out.” Have it all planned out with the sitter arranged so all your wife has to do is put her coat on.

Nurture the seeds you want to grow. Water the seeds of contention, resentment, bitterness and criticism and guess what grows? Choking weeds. Water the seeds of forgiveness, tolerance, patience, appreciation and romance and these plants and flowers flourish and bloom. Weeds require little to no effort to grow. Vegetables and flowers take considerable effort to grow. Our care with these seeds comes back to us in the form of satisfaction that we

have sown and reaped well as they nourish our bodies, minds, souls and relationships.

It’s all how you look at it. Remember Dick Van Dyke’s character Robert Petry from the old “Dick Van Dyke Show?” He stated, “Some see the walls around marriage as those around a prison. Others see them as those around Disneyland.” Your perspective is your choice. If you want Disneyland create it inside. Disneyland did not just happen. Good marriages don’t either.

Give her wings when she needs to fly. Encourage her dreams and help with any obstacles that may be in her way of achieving them. For example, when I finished my graduate studies in Illinois my wife and I returned to Utah so my wife could finish her degree. I had job opportunities where we were. To me, though, I could work anywhere, but to my wife there was only one Brigham Young University and she had a chance to finish her degree there. Did I sacrifice by this decision? Maybe. But it didn’t feel like it. The message it sent to her about her importance as well as the enjoyment she and I get when she tells people, “Yeah, my husband went to school here and then we followed him there and then he followed me back to Utah because it was my turn.” She gets to “brag” in a fun way and I look good. Did I do it so I could look good? No. Is it nice icing on the cake? You bet it is. It also brings us together and cements our mutual commitment to each other’s dreams.

For more ways to infuse romance into your marriage visit bardos.net/dailyromance.

Watch future columns for more strategies for creating greatness in your relationships.

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