

Marriage Doctors Know How to Make Love Last

Doctors Elizabeth and Charles Schmitz, authors of *Golden Anniversaries: Seven Secrets to Successful Marriage*, know what it takes to make a marriage work. They have been happily married for 42 years, have one child and two grandchildren, they work and play together, and each considers the other their best friend. It has been, in their own words, “almost magical.” Oh, and Charley still thinks Liz is “hot.”

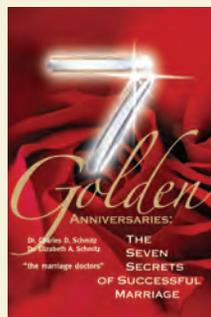
Not bad for an era when roughly half of all marriages end in divorce. Known throughout the counseling industry as “the marriage doctors,” they felt the personal impact of that ugly statistic 20 years ago: of the original 12 couples they had developed as a circle of friends, none of the marriages had survived. Not one. So Liz, the professional educator, and Charley, also an educator who specializes in counseling therapy, decided to find out what exactly makes a marriage successful.

What they discovered is not only fascinating and practical, but inspirational, as well. “First of all,” said Charley, “we knew that studying failed marriages was a dead end. The only way to find out why some marriages succeed is to study successful marriages, and that approach has set us apart from other marriage practitioners over the years.” Despite the statistics, most marriages are not doomed to failure, and the solutions are easier to implement than one might think.

“Generally,” says Liz, “we start with couples that have been together for at least 30 years, and we’ll literally go anywhere in the world to find them.” The doctors ask a couple to complete a lengthy questionnaire and interview that highlight the details of their relationship, touching on everything from meeting circumstances to family histories to comparative personal values and habits. What they have concluded is stunning in its simplicity.

“Trust is the basis of any sound relationship,” says Charley, “marital or otherwise.” But there’s more to it than that. “It really comes down to the simple things,” adds Liz. “Random acts of kindness, holding hands, supportive words, mutual respect—these are the building blocks and the glue that creates and sustains strong marriages.” Sound too good to be true? According to the Drs. Schmitz, it’s not.

And they don’t limit themselves to U.S. couples as a source group. Their approach thus far has been exceptionally cosmopolitan. “We’ve been to five of the seven continents so far,” explains Liz, “and Africa is our next stop.” What they have found is that, with the exception of cultures that feature arranged marriages, the principles guiding the creation of solid marriages in this country apply just about everywhere else. “We’ve just scratched the surface in places like China,” says Charley, “but because the circumstances in those places are so different than in the West, especially the role and place of women, we have decided to back away from the area and concentrate on contemporary Western societies.”



Responding to repeated requests to collect their insights into book form, the authors have distilled 25 years of interviews representing more than 15,000 years of marriage into a handful of relationship-sustaining principles.

They explain these insights through poignant stories gathered from hundreds of couples, including secrets they’ve learned from their own 42-year marriage. “Marriage is worth saving,” according to Charley, “and the candor of our subjects has allowed us to create a kind of guidebook that can improve just about any relationship.” Although some marriages are simply, and sadly, too abusive to save, most can be rejuvenated by following the seven secrets described in the book. *Golden Anniversaries: Seven Secrets to Successful Marriage*, is the capstone to this couple’s life’s work.

At the end of the day, though, there is really nothing mysterious about marriage, a point the couple emphasizes repeatedly. “There are really no magic tricks involved,” says Charley. “The suggestions we make are rather plain and down to earth. But once a couple begins to see the light by following these secrets, a whole new world opens up to them, sometimes in a single instant of liberating self-awareness. And that’s when marriage morphs from the mundane to the magical.” But it doesn’t hurt if your spouse thinks you’re “still hot” after all those years.



Drs. Charles D. and Elizabeth A. Schmitz

Read and learn more about the Drs. Schmitz and their Mom’s Choice Award-winning book, *Golden Anniversaries: Seven Secrets to Successful Marriage* at www.goldenanniversaries.com.

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Dr. Charles D. Schmitz is a highly successful faculty member and administrator and has been in higher education for 40 years. His teaching has focused on the areas of counseling psychology and leadership development. He received his Ph.D. degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia and is currently Dean of the College of Education and Professor of Counseling and Family Therapy at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Dr. Elizabeth A. Schmitz was an award-winning administrator and educator in K-12 schools for 36 years and has lectured in numerous college courses in the areas of counseling and leadership since receiving her doctoral degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She is president of Successful Marriage Reflections, LLC.