

Ep #21: The Key to Long-Lasting Relationship Happiness



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With Your Host

Lauren Fair

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You're listening to *The Sensible Split* podcast, Episode 21. Today, we're going to talk about how to increase your overall level of fulfillment in your life by getting very clear on what you want out of your marriage or your next relationship.

The Sensible Split is a podcast for smart but overwhelmed women in search of a roadmap to a successful separation and divorce. If you are looking for guidance in navigating the practical, legal, and emotional aspects of divorce with confidence, this is the show for you. Here's your host, Master Certified Life and Divorce Coach, Divorce Attorney, and Mediator, Lauren Fair.

Hello there. Welcome back to the podcast this week. It is good to be back with you. I hope you are having a great start to your week.

I just got back to the office today after about 16 days in Europe. I went on a fabulous Mediterranean cruise, which was really fun. I love going to Europe, and I try to go about once a year now. I have never been on a cruise in the Mediterranean and this was like a bucket list item for my mother. And so I got to go with her and visit a number of new countries that I hadn't been to before. And so, yeah, it was really awesome.

I am just back getting back into the groove of things, and I am excited to be back and talk with you. What I want to talk to you about this week is something that actually came to me while I was on the plane on my way over to Rome. It's something that I think is really important for us to do in our lives, in relation to your marriage or potentially your next major relationship in your life with a significant other.

I was sitting on the plane and I was thinking about how much I have been traveling this year. It is something that I consciously have changed in my life. I realized at some point that in order for me to feel fulfilled in my life, I wanted to have more travel. And so that's something that I have been very intentionally incorporating into my life.

I was really just reflecting on that on the plane, about, "Wow, I've been traveling a lot this year. This is really awesome." I'm generally feeling more fulfilled in my life, in part because of that change that I made. And I was thinking about that trip

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in particular. I also went to Oahu in July for my 10th anniversary. I shared a little bit about that with you in previous episodes. And I think when you approach the 10-year anniversary of your marriage, it's just sort of a natural time to reevaluate things.

Like, "Wow, we've been married for 10 years now. How's it going? We've made it to 10 years". And this is, by the way, my second marriage. As you may know, my first marriage did not make it to 10 years. My second marriage is now at 10 years, and I think it's just a natural time to evaluate things. Like, "Hey, what's going well with this?" "I generally feel good about this relationship still." "That's cool. Let's figure out what are the reasons for that."

Or, is there anything that I'd like to make changes around at this particular time? So I think this was just something that came up for me naturally in hitting that 10-year mark in marriage, and also for that 10-year mark doing that traveling for the anniversary that I really wanted to do. And that kind of being tied into my overall fulfillment. Like that just being something I wanted to do, and I made it happen for the 10-year anniversary.

So when I was reflecting on the marriage at that 10-year point, and reflecting on how these changes in my life have led to more fulfillment, I remembered that I had made a note on what I wanted out of marriage back before my second husband and I got married.

Back then, I thought about, "Hey, I think I need to get clear on what do I want out of this marriage." And so I made a list of those things and I kept it in my phone. And at the point that it was our 10-year anniversary this summer, I thought perhaps it was time to revisit that. So I pulled out that old note, I looked at it, and I just was in a moment of gratitude for my former self that I put that together back then.

Because I wanted to reevaluate now whether those things that I wanted back then were still what I want now. Whether that had changed at all. Whether they were the same. Whether there was some combination of some things that are the same, some things have changed. And also just to kind of check in on where

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I am with those things. It was very enlightening, actually, to look back at those things and to evaluate them.

And I'll give you a couple of examples of things. I titled the note something like, "What I want out of this marriage," when we were thinking about getting married. A couple of those things were, for example, a financial alliance. What I wanted was the two of us to be better off financially together than we were apart. I wanted to be able to achieve certain things for ourselves that we could do better together financially. And I wanted us to be on the same page about spending and financial habits in general.

I also wanted annual travel. I will say in the beginning years of our marriage, we didn't have so much of that because we had little kids a couple of years into the marriage. And so that was something that took some time to get going and has been more prevalent in more recent years. And I think that's, again, kind of the connection for me between travel and this issue coming to mind.

Another thing was I wanted to feel loved and feel like I have a partner in the relationship. Feeling like you have an actual partner in the relationship was just something that was important for me, and I think is important for a lot of people.

I wanted to have a stable place of residence to call our family home. And I wanted to have children, or at least the option to have children. So this isn't a comprehensive list, but these are a few things, as examples, that I listed about what I wanted out of my marriage.

I think sometimes, when we get married, we go into it from a place of a strong feeling. You feel like you're totally in love with this person, and it's just a general feeling that you have that drives that decision to take the relationship to the next level rather than there being a practical approach. You might even call it unromantic in some ways.

But I like to look at it as a practical approach of, "Okay, when this feeling fades, what is it that I really want out of this relationship?" And it's not to say that you aren't going to feel love, or you're not going to feel attracted to somebody, you're not going to feel in love with them.

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But when the intensity of the newness of this wears off, what is underneath that will keep me fulfilled in this relationship? What is it that I really want? Why am I getting married to begin with? What is the benefit to me of getting married? What are the practical things that I want out of this relationship?

I thought about my first marriage in this context in retrospect, and we did this in a different way. When we were dating, we had a “re-evaluation day”, we called it. Which was some predetermined date that we decided we were going to re-evaluate whether we wanted to continue dating, and continue on in the relationship and whatever we felt like the next step of that was.

And so I think we had the spirit of this down. But in application, it didn't really work very well, because I didn't take the time to actually get very clear on what I wanted out of that relationship, or what I wanted out of the eventual marriage that I had with him.

When we re-evaluated whether we wanted to continue on in the relationship, that I think more or less consisted of just a general feeling of, “Yeah, I'm still into you. You're still into me. Cool, let's just keep on with this relationship.” And we never really did anything beyond that. It was still that, “I am into you, you're into me, let's keep going.” And so we got married.

I never really got clear for myself on what I wanted out of that marriage. How I would assess whether it was going well or not, again, beyond a feeling. And so that really didn't serve me very well in assessing, after I had my first marriage, whether it was meeting the goals that I had for the marriage.

And so I think at some point it just became like, again, just sort of a general feeling of, “Okay, now this marriage isn't actually feeling good.” I didn't have any kind of objective criteria to look back at to say, “Okay, this is what I wanted. Am I getting this? Am I not?”

In doing that with my second marriage, it has allowed me to really have a better framework for continually assessing whenever I want to. It's not a daily event, right? A daily basis reassessing my marriage. But whenever I want to. Or a big

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milestone comes up, like an anniversary, where I want to kind of just check in and say, “Is this relationship still serving me?”

And the point of this isn't to be perfectionistic, “Here's my list of demands for this relationship. And if they're not all being met, then, well, it should be over.” That's not what I'm saying at all. What I'm saying is, it's helpful to be very clear with yourself about what you want out of the marriage.

Or if your marriage is over and you're considering a new relationship, this is the same process, right? This applies to you, whether you are thinking of ending your marriage or whether you're thinking of getting into a new relationship. And being able to have some kind of a framework for better success this time for how to stay on top of whether a relationship is working for you or not.

But if you have that set of objective criteria, you have the ability to go back to it. And so it becomes less about a feeling all the time, that may be different from day to day, and it's more data driven.

For example, a few years back, I checked in with that note and evaluated where I was meeting those goals for the marriage and where I wasn't. I realized a few years back that I just wanted annual travel and that really wasn't happening. So I decided to change this. And this year, the number of trips I have taken has been more than in previous years. I'm very happy with that.

But I had to be aware of a certain lack of fulfillment and where that was coming from for me personally. And so I became aware of it, and then I decided to change it. I have done that, and I've increased my overall level of fulfillment.

Another example is I wanted regular dates with my husband. That was something that I set out initially too in my list. I would like to have regular dates where we go out and we spend time alone as a couple doing things that we enjoy. I realized a few years back... Again, I think in large part because we have little kids and we don't have family here locally... we were not doing that. And so I looked at where I can make changes to be able to get closer to what the goals are here.

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And so I have intentionally been setting dates for us in recent history, and we really enjoy those. Again, my overall fulfillment has increased because I was able to go back to that and look at where we are falling a little bit short on some of these things that we really wanted, and what can I do to change them.

So my life, it really now is more fulfilling based on having that clear criteria, plus regularly evaluating and making adjustments. Whether you're considering leaving your marriage, or even if you have already left and are considering a serious new relationship, consider adopting this process to increase your overall level of life fulfillment as it relates to this major relationship.

I want you to ask yourself, what do I want out of this marriage or relationship? Get very specific. What do you want your life to look like? What experiences do you want to be having on a regular basis? Make that list for yourself. It doesn't have to be what my list is, it's just for you to think about your life as a whole, on a day-to-day basis, on a monthly basis, on a yearly basis.

What are the things that you want to have in your life? What is important to you? To your overall life fulfillment? And how does a partner fit into those things for you? Your partner should be making your life better, in the sense that you can make your life great on your own and your partner should be helping you elevate that to an even better level.

And so what does that look like for you? What are the things that need to be in place for you to have the most fulfillment in your life? Get very clear on that. Then you want to evaluate that criteria over a reasonable period of time. It's not roses all of the time. This is not an exercise in perfection. Take an honest look over the course of your relationship from curiosity and not judgment. What percent of the time do I think I am meeting each one of these? What do I think about that?

Again, I had my list of criteria. I wanted to go on dates regularly with my husband. When I evaluated that and realized that wasn't happening, it's not like, "Okay, that's not happening. So I'm going to end the relationship," right? It's just something to allow you to be able to look back and evaluate, where am I meeting these goals? Where am I not meeting these goals? And what do I have

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control over to change here? If there are adjustments to be made, what are they? What can I do to change these things?

So for example, when I looked at the criteria of, "I'd like to be going on regular dates with my husband," I could look at that and be like, "Well, I could just wait for him to schedule them," right? And it's not that he won't do that, but if I want that, then I'm going to take the initiative to do that. He enjoys doing it, it's just something that I'm better at scheduling so I'm going to go ahead and do those things.

Now, if I were in a situation where I wanted that and my husband didn't, and he wasn't willing to do those things, well, that's something a little meatier then to take a closer look at; about whether that's something that you're willing to accept in the relationship.

And so it's about taking a look at these criteria over a reasonable period of time, right? Everybody goes through ups and downs. If there's a short period of time where things aren't going that well, you can consider that in the context of the greater relationship. But over a reasonable period of time, how often are these things being met? Where is my power to make changes to these things? What can I do to make a change for the better?

And if there are things that require my spouse to get on board with, and they are not willing to do that, then what do I think about that? What am I willing to accept in my marriage? What are the things I could do to encourage change? And if that change is not made, then what am I willing to do?

I hope that this episode has been helpful for you. Whether you're thinking about ending your marriage, or you are thinking about starting a new relationship and you want to do it on a better foot this time, I would really encourage you to try out this process and see what it brings up for you.

All right, that's what I have for you this week. Take care. I'll see you in the next episode.

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