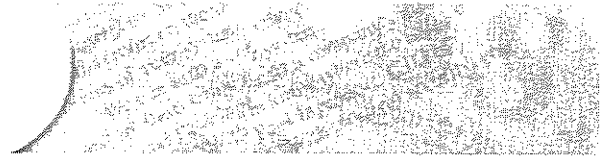


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2 people, 2 professions, 1 marriage

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Marital advice from two divorce lawyers who have seen it all

Isn't love grand? Two people, young and in love, hold a fantastic party with all their friends and family; everybody's wearing pretty clothes and the food is fantastic. As the partygoers wave goodbye, the happy couple drives away in a limo, on the way to that blissful place we call marriage.

And then they get back from Hawaii.

They return to work, they buy a house, they go to Home Depot (a lot), they have babies, they go to Babies R Us (a lot), and their life becomes a whirlwind of details. Sometimes, those marriages don't work. And that's where we come in.

Between us, we have handled hundreds of divorces, none of them our own, thankfully. (Did we mention we've been married for 21 years? To each other?) One might think that spending most of your time standing amid the rubble of other people's failed marriages would wreak havoc on our own. Ironically, the opposite has been true. Spending our married lives around divorce has given us perspective that few married couples have.

Particularly when both spouses are professionals with demanding jobs, it can be difficult to make one's marriage a high priority. But it is *the* only way to keep it strong. Here are some tips, gleaned from a combined 57 years of practice, on maintaining a healthy marriage between two professionals:

Absence doesn't always make the heart grow fonder: While having some breathing room is great, too much of it opens the door to distraction. We've always made it a priority to go to sleep together every night. Despite our travel schedules, we've only violated that twice in 21 years.

To give you an idea of how much we travel, Mike just received his two million-mile lifetime card from American Airlines, and Mary Jo has a lifetime gold card from American. That doesn't include our time on Southwest Airlines (which is how we fly most of the time.) If an obligation requires us to sleep apart, unless it is an absolute emergency, we do not take it.

Don't talk about work at the dinner table: One of the most common complaints we get from divorcing spouses goes like this: "You can't imagine how often my husband checks his Blackberry at night." By blurring the lines between work and home, couples sabotage their down time, the time they should be connecting, not drifting farther apart.

Relaxing and connecting with loved ones requires disconnecting from the office. Turn cell phones off, don't take business calls at home, *don't take your laptop on vacation*. We have found that, even if

we just talk about work around 8:30 p.m., it sabotages our entire evening and shortchanges our marriage.

Get thee to a bowling alley (or a playground or an ice cream parlor): Time together doesn't need to be spent in deep conversation. In fact, we have found that the more frivolous our activity, the more rejuvenating it is.

We have a tradition: Every Friday afternoon when we're done with official business, we look in the paper and go to the next movie that's starting. We don't debate whether we want to see it or it's gotten bad reviews. We just go. We call it built-in spontaneity. And it's one of our favorite things in life. The downside to this is that we've seen more than our fair share of bad movies. But the upside is that we catch the occasional sleeper that we would have otherwise not seen. The suspense is fun, but the shared frivolity is even better.

Have a conversational "kill" switch: Not all marital communications are fun, but they're the key to maintaining honesty and intimacy. Nevertheless, sometimes, those deep conversations start becoming divisive. So we make sure that we both understand that when one person calls for a timeout, it's honored by the other person. This keeps our conversations from getting too heated, and it prevents us from blurting out things we'll regret.

It's so tough to find good help, but you should anyway: When two people spend all day at work, they don't need to come home and fight over whose turn it is to fold the laundry or mow the lawn. Hire as much help as you can. It may require some belt-tightening, but your sanity, and your marriage, is worth it.

Marriage can be really, really nice. Knowing that you'll have somebody to hold hands with in your 80s is comforting. But in order to have that hand to hold, you and your spouse need to put "we" over "me" and time together over just about everything else. With a lot of commitment and hard work, you might just be able to stay in Hawaii.

Mike and Mary Johanna McCurley are co-founders of McCurley, Orsinger, McCurley, Nelson & Downing, one of the larger law firms in Texas devoted solely to family law. Both are board certified in Family Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization.

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