

Insight Into Yourself Crucial To A Successful Remarriage

"Love is lovelier the second time around . . ." or so Frank Sinatra sang in 1961. Although it's true that many couples find happiness in second marriages, according to statistics, 60 percent of remarriages end in divorce.



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When there are children, the numbers are as high as 65 percent — not inspiring odds.

Yet relationships hold the promise of joy and completeness, so we take the plunge again and even again.

Remarriages are not automatically easier, more intimate or more satisfying. They are only newer. They're often more challenging because of step-parenting, ex-spouses and other blended-family issues.

When things don't work out, it's natural to blame the other person before taking a good look at ourselves. You might not make the same mistakes you made before, but you might make new ones. If all you learned from your last marriage is that your former partner was a lousy mate, you're not in a very good position to make a better choice the next time around.

Diane, 48, is ending her second marriage after four years. She married her first husband, Vincent, right out of high school. "We were young, foolish and

thought we were in love," she told me, smiling through her tears. "He was a good guy, and we had lots of fun, but there wasn't any chemistry. At some point, I guess we just decided it was time to get married. All our friends were doing it. . . . I filed for divorce after 20 passionless years. I wanted more. We have two amazing kids. Samantha will be graduating from college this year, and Alex is entering his freshman year.

"I met Roger, my second husband, at the health club," Diane said. "I was newly separated, and love starved. He was strong, secure and passionate — exactly what I thought I needed at the time. The romantic connection was incredible. We used to spend hours in bed. But it all ended right after the honeymoon. He turned out to be incredibly egotistical. It's all about him.

"Why do I keep picking the wrong partners?" she asked, sobbing. "I don't have that many good years left."

Couples who see me after two or more failed marriages are often bewildered. They complain that their spouse "changed" right after they got married or "became a different person," instead of considering how they might be drawn to certain individuals and what their role is in the entire process.

In my book "Extraordinary Sex Now: A Couple's Guide to Intimacy" (Doubleday, 1998), I write about the unconscious 'attraction of completeness' between couples and say, "One of the

prime reasons relationships fail, again and again, is that we are unknowingly attracted to and fall in love with a part of what is lacking in ourselves." Sounds like an odd concept, but we all know people who marry the same type of person, even though they appeared to be different at first.

In Diane's case, her history revealed that her father died suddenly of a pulmonary embolism when she was only 5. Mom worked out of the home, and Diane was shuttled among three sets of neighbors. She never knew whose home she would be going to after school. Her mom also drank heavily, and Diane remembers seeing her passed out on the living room sofa, the smell of alcohol, and the fear of being alone.

After taking some time to explore her own history, Diane started to understand why she had become attracted to certain men and their characteristics — Vincent's stability and Roger's strength. It's like going shopping when you're starving; you buy what you crave, not what might be most nourishing.

Human beings are complex. Our needs vary, and other qualities that we may not have bargained for come along in the romantic mix. The initial attraction that makes you feel "complete" in the other person's presence may be a signal that you're falling in love with a "missing piece" of yourself, so beware.

"But doesn't every partner offer us

missing pieces?" I can hear you asking. "If I had everything I needed within myself, why would I want anyone else? I'd be happy alone."

The answer to that question is yes and no. Yes, you'd be happy alone (that's the idea), but you would still enjoy having a partner to share with, someone to love and with whom you could experience more than what you offer yourself. But if you marry for safety, security, adequacy, competence or self-worth, be forewarned — those formative experiences are developed within us. No one can provide you with the essential building blocks to your own personal well-being.

I've never had a couple come to my office and say, "We have a marital problem. . . . Things would be so much better if only I weren't so needy or if I were less selfish."

Unless you understand how you contributed to the demise of your last union, it's doubtful that your next one will fare any better. When it comes to remarriage, experience isn't the best teacher; insight is.

Divorce is a legal dis-solution, not an emotional solution. The court does nothing to repair hurt or prepare us to make a better decision next time. Divorce is a death, regardless of the nature of the union. Even in the worst marriages, it is a loss, if only of a dream. Ended marriages deserve the decency of a proper burial, taking time to reflect on what worked and what didn't, the good

times and the bad. We all know people who are busy shopping on the Internet for their next partner before the body of their last partner is even cold.

People who look for romance on the rebound are asking for trouble. Fear of abandonment or being alone is a huge motivator for rushing into a new relationship before doing the necessary work.

All of this may sound grim. But it depends on how you take it. Marriage *can* be sweeter the second time around — if we're more realistic about our role in its success.

"Only in relationships can you know yourself, not in abstraction and certainly not in isolation."

— J. Krishnamurti

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