

a SIMPLE MARRIAGE manifesto

Create a better marriage by keeping things simple.

By Dr. Corey Allan

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A Simple Marriage Manifesto

"A relationship is like a shark. It has to constantly move forward or it dies." ~ Woody Allen

Both men and women tend to be equally bad at relationships, so the health of your relationship is actually in your hands.

Every couple that comes to see me in my marriage counseling practice does so with certain expectations - the number one is to seek my help in working on their relationship.

At the outset of our time together, just as I do with the couples I work with, let me be clear about this expectation.

The idea that you and your spouse can seek out help in **working on your relationship** is flawed, because you've got it backwards.

The relationship is working on you!

It's the way relationships are designed.

Relationships are designed as people growing machines - especially marriage. No other relationship will produce the possibilities for more joy, love, and connection, as well as

frustration, disappointment, and anxiety (your relationship with your parents is also capable of this but marriage provides a container for this *and* marriage is chosen, your family of origin is not).

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Entering the matrix

One of my favorite movies is *The Matrix*, the story of Thomas Anderson (Neo) who works in a cubicle and lives a regular life until he meets Morpheus, who introduces him to the fact the world around them isn't real.

Similar to Morpheus' proposal to Neo, you are being presented a blue pill or a red pill.

If you take the blue pill, you will read through this on the surface, you may agree with the premise of this manifesto but not actually apply any of this to your life. In other words, you will largely continue with marriage and life as you have been. Believing whatever you wish to believe all the while living unaware of the natural dynamics impacting you and your spouse.

If you choose to take the red pill ... hold on.

Things are about to change. The way you view what goes on in marriage will be different. If your marriage is in crisis, this view may not save your current relationship, it will help you to know better where you stand in the relationship, as well as your spouse.

The idea of this manifesto is not to save your marriage (although I hope and believe it can), nor is it to end your relationship - it is intended to help you and your spouse become better people (to lean into the people growing process of marriage). Do this, and this manifesto will improve your marriage, and your life.

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Growing up

One of the things you read a lot at Simple Marriage is the idea that **marriage is designed to help you grow up**. In psychobabble terms this is referred to as differentiation, which may appear to be the same as individuation (or becoming your own person) but it's not.

Differentiation (referred to as *growing up* or *being emotionally mature*) encompasses two things:

1. It's the ability to separate your two main ways of processing the world around you, **thinking** and **feeling**. Every one of us has the ability to access both of these processes, and you likely have a primary way of processing things. You may be a thinker in how you process the world, or you could be a feeler.

Differentiation involves a higher order way of processing, as it's the ability to *choose* how you want to respond. You can think *or* feel, while being dominated by neither.

2. It also involves balancing two fundamental life forces: the drive for **separateness** and the drive for **togetherness**. Separateness propels us to be on our own, to chart our own course in life, and to create our own identity. Togetherness pushes us to be part of a group, to connect with others, and experience things only relationships can provide.

When these two life forces are expressed in balanced, healthy ways, meaningful relationships are created where both members develop into better people.

In essence, a marriage works more on the people involved than the people involved work on the marriage.

Growing up can be conceptualized as a continuum of functioning: from high to low.

People at a higher level of growth are able to separate thinking from feeling - and they are better able to choose which type of functioning, whether it be emotional or intellectual, guides their behavior. They are better able to balance thinking and feeling, and are more capable of balancing strong emotion and spontaneity with self-regulation and objectivity.

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Emotionally mature people are also able to accept responsibility for their emotions *without* blaming others.

Also, within a committed relationship, the higher the level of growth, the greater the capacity for intimate contact with others without being reflexively shaped by them, and the greater the capacity to allow others the room to be themselves. They have the ability to invest themselves in their spouse and the relationship without becoming dependent on either (*one of the scariest aspects of marriage is the fact that your spouse is a separate being beyond your control. They can behave however they like and can choose to do whatever they want*).

Meanwhile, people with lower levels of growth have difficulty distinguishing between their thoughts and feelings, and have little autonomous identity. A less emotionally mature person is so flooded with feelings, that he or she is almost incapable of objective thinking. Behavior is governed by emotional reactions to the dictates or feelings of others. They are more vulnerable to stress, tend to have more life problems, and are less flexible in attempting to solve problems – especially during times of crisis, like the possible dissolution of a marriage or the discovery of a spouse's betrayal.

In relationships, the lower the growth level, the higher the need for important or significant others to think, feel, and behave in certain ways.

A spouse's thoughts, actions, and even beliefs are viewed as a reflection of themselves rather than simply the belief of another person.

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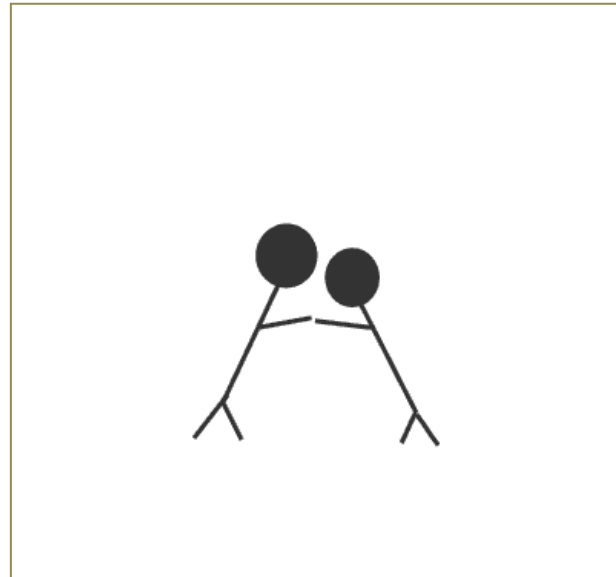
Another alternative

Imagine two people standing face to face about 5 feet apart from one another, their arms are at extended in front of themselves and they are leaning into one another holding each other up. Together they create the letter A (pictured in the center).

In this type of a relationship, where is your focus going to be when it comes to your own stability, importance, value, and balance?

Answer: **Your partner.**

Because your remaining upright and functioning is contingent on their propping you up and keeping you balanced. If they slip, stumble, move away, say something you don't like (or you say something your partner doesn't like) or choose to leave, you'll fall. So your focus winds up being completely on them and their feelings, happiness, or fear of their disapproval.



It makes sense, because if they no longer prop you up, or are capable of supporting you, you risk falling.

Here's an example of how this plays out.

A husband and wife are sitting in my office discussing their marriage. Often times, the husband is frustrated (actually they both are). No matter what he has tried in the past, he has never seemed to find the right formula for keeping his wife happy, in a good mood, and wanting sex. He is cautiously hopeful that there is indeed a way to understand women, and to have the kind of relationship he thought he would have when they first began dating.

Both he and she are in my office because neither one is really happy.

Typically, they both believe that the other person is the cause of their dissatisfaction. He believes that if she were different, everything would be okay. She is convinced that if he would change, she would be happy.

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They each see the other as the problem.

Both are wrong.

Actually, it's not their fault. They are just doing what their parents did (or maybe trying to do the opposite). They are using the relationship skills and defenses they learned while they were kids. She expects her husband to be like her girlfriends. He thinks that she thinks like he does. She keeps trying to get him to talk. He keeps trying to get her to want more sex.

They both mistakenly assume they want the same thing. The problem is they communicate in two different languages.

All the while their focus is on their spouse because their own balance in life is based on their spouse's being there for them or meeting their needs.

One of the main ideas behind Simple Marriage is to shift the focus away from your spouse and place it squarely on your own shoulders.

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Standing on your own two feet

When your focus shifts off of your partner and on to yourself, a couple of things happen. One, you take pressure off of your spouse and their need to change and then two, you take charge of what you control in the relationship – yourself.

INSANITY is doing more of the same and expecting different results. When what most couples are doing isn't working, they act insane - they keep doing more of the same.

Many people feel frustrated by their inability to create and maintain the kind of passionate, satisfying relationships they so deeply crave.

Due to fear, habit, self-limiting beliefs, and the application of a flawed model of relationship-leadership, they trudge along doing the same old thing while magically expecting different results.

Luckily, there is an antidote to all the insanity.

When a person shows up in their intimate relationship, takes responsibility for setting the tone for himself or herself, and takes the lead for their own life with love and integrity, both them and their partner have the greatest opportunity to experience what they both most deeply desire.

By learning how to stand on your own two feet your relationship possibilities become limitless.

Here are just a few ways you can learn to stand on your own two feet:

- Be honest and transparent
- Learning how to be 100% present
- Set healthy boundaries
- Creating a great life and allowing your spouse to be the “icing” on the cake
- Beginning to do what is challenging rather than what is expedient

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The payoff for standing on your own two feet

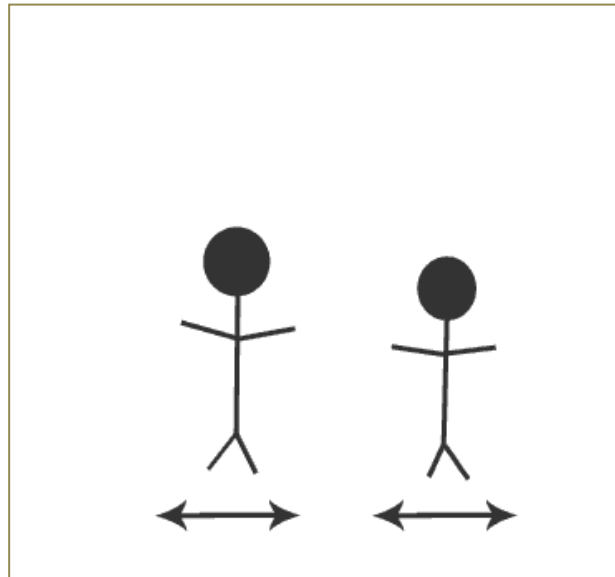
It may seem counter-intuitive to focus more on yourself in order to create a better relationship, but it's exactly how it happens.

A relationship that leans on each other can never get as close as you probably want it to. Look at the first drawing again.

How close can that couple get to each other?

Not very.

But a couple where both people stand on their own two feet can get as close as they choose (pictured on the right).



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Blow up your relationship

By **growing up** and taking the lead in your intimate relationship, it will both grow and become more than you ever imagined, or it will crumble into dust and be swept away. Either way, the question of whether to stay or leave becomes a no-brainer.

It is your job to “blow up” your relationship. When you **grow up**, you allow your relationship to **get to rejection quickly**. In this way you can clearly know what to do next.

By the way, getting to rejection quickly does not mean you quickly decide to leave because of your spouse’s rejection – it means that you put more of yourself out there and become more present in the relationship. You let your wants be known by making them a priority for you.

Several clients with whom I’ve worked have decided to get to rejection quickly by growing up and being more honest and transparent and they’ve experienced a growth of passion and happiness with their spouse that they had never thought possible. By taking responsibility for their own life and needs, they gave themselves,

their partner, and their relationship the chance to become all they could be.

Alternatively, one of my clients spent years trying to avoid conflict and make his wife happy. He lived in fear of her moods and reactions. After reading about being a “Nice Guy” and this idea of getting to rejection, he decided to do the same thing in his marriage. Instead of avoiding issues that he thought might upset his wife, he decided to lean into his fear and to quickly find out what would happen if he were completely honest and straightforward. Within just a few weeks of practicing this, it became clear that his marriage was over (and that she had already found someone else). He has continued to follow this idea and has begun a new relationship with a woman and has never been happier.

When tough times happen in marriage and one or both of you find yourselves unhappy, no longer in love, or constantly fighting, **growing up** and leaning into the conflict is the quickest path to a clear answer.

A SIDE NOTE: You can’t think your way through this situation. You have to *act* your way through.

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Staying only marginally in and being lazy in the relationship by waiting for your spouse to change or do something different is a cancer.

Many couples co-exist in smoldering unhappiness, resentment and frustration for years. My wife and I have been there personally, and I've watched it over and over again professionally. Being only part-way-in kills relationships and destroys the people involved. Unfortunately, people have the ability to inflict suffering on their partner (and to tolerate their own suffering) for years.

No matter what your current relationship looks like, by growing up, you can step up and give it the chance to become all that it can be.

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What growing up is and isn't

When you begin to view marriage as an opportunity to grow up, you will begin to see the life forces of separateness and togetherness playing out in your life and marriage.

Men will often sacrifice their relationships in order to maintain their sense of self, while women tend to sacrifice themselves in order to maintain their relationships.

Growing up is about having more of a relationship with yourself *and* more relationship with your partner. *It's having your feelings without your feelings having you.*

Giving up your separateness in order to be together is as defeating in the long run as giving up your relationship in order to maintain your separateness. Either way, you end up being less of a person with less of a relationship.

Growing up requires quite a bit of work and is often confused with other ideas, so here's a few important clarifications:

Growing up requires the ability to maintain a solid sense of self when your partner is away or you're not currently in a primary love relationship.

Growing up values contact but doesn't fall apart when you're alone. This is especially difficult during crisis points in marriage. Where it seems the marriage may fall apart if you give up on it. Growing up means you allow the relationship to take care of itself while you take care of you. Be honest - but don't force it. Be present and lead your life with love and integrity.

Growing up does not involve any lack of feelings or emotions.

Growing up means you can evaluate your emotions (and your spouse's) both subjectively and objectively. In other words, you can connect with your spouse without fear of being swept up in their emotions. You can have your feelings without them having you because they don't control or define your sense of self.

When people scream "I got to be me!" "I need space!" and "That's just the way I am!" they are not growing up.

In fact, just the opposite. When you are afraid you'll disappear in the relationship you do things in order to avoid your spouse's emotional

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engulfment. This is different than boundary setting, which is an important aspect of growing up. The difference is boundary setting while growing up is done in the context of staying in the relationship (i.e. in close proximity and restricted space). The process of holding onto yourself in the midst of an important relationship is what creates growth.

Growing up means becoming solid but permeable.

When you have solid core beliefs and values, you can adapt and change without losing your identity. You can be influenced by others and adjust to new circumstances as the situations warrant. It is important to realize however, this flexible sense of identity develops slowly over time, requires soul-searching deliberation, and is not simply adapting to the wishes of others.

Your personal development is not selfish.

You can choose to be guided by your partner's best interests, even at the price of your own agenda. This is often the price of committed relationships. Your partner is a separate individual – just like you. You can reach a point where what they want for themselves is as important to you as what you want for yourself.

As you reach higher levels of growth, your view of conflict in relationships will dramatically shift. "What I want for myself versus what I want for you" shifts to "What I want for myself versus my wanting for you what you want for yourself."

When you feel you need to talk your partner out of what he or she wants in order for you to get your way, you lose.

When things in marriage seem the toughest, remember this statement:

Whatever you are 100% responsible for, you're 100% responsible for it. If you're not 100% responsible for it, you're not at all responsible for it.

This begins and ends with you.

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My Challenge to You

Growing up is the most courageous action you can take in any relationship situation.

It challenges you to act with integrity and love. It forces you to grow, and to **become your best self.** It invites your spouse to do the same. It gives your relationship the opportunity to become all that it can be. It reveals the truth of any situation.

Great relationships don't happen by accident or luck.

They are the result of people becoming conscious of how they get in their own way, and discovering how to act with genuine love and integrity toward their spouse.

You can have the kind of amazing relationship you have always wanted. I warn you though: it isn't always easy - but it's worth it.

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What's next?

I don't believe that what happens in life is fate. Marriage is one of the greatest relationships and experiences. It is also a choice. Remember the Choose Your Own Adventure books? Life is like that. So is marriage. It's waiting for you to decide whether your relationships will be average or great.

What will you choose?

It's your turn now.

Strength and honor,

Corey

Please do me a couple of favors: If this manifesto has meant anything to you, come over and post a short comment on my site. I'd really appreciate it.

<http://www.simplemarriage.net/manifesto.html>

Also, spread word. Share this with your friends, family, co-workers, neighbors, blog readers, and the people you meet on the street. Thank you.