

Foundations

A Newsletter for Married Couples

Spring 2019

How To's of Decisions

If you are watching some of the many home repair shows on HGTV, you're not alone! Home design shows are very popular, and an important element of them involves marital decision-making. Does the couple want a city or country location? What is on their wish list and how important is it?

The Hammer Approach

In one show, a woman was so intent on having French doors that she threw a hammer through a window so it would have to be replaced! In other cases, something that seemed important at first becomes less so as the show progresses. If

you have seen *Love it or List It*, you know that it is really based on the couple having different ideas about their home – one wants to fix up the home they have and the other wants to move.

Guidelines

All of us face decisions that we have to work through, whether it's about where we want to live, or about jobs, children, or finances. Are there steps to work through these challenges? You might find the following guidelines for making decisions helpful.

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Decisions

Shared Decision Making – The Married Kind

You have been making decisions for years, but being married adds a different dimension to the process. You're not just making choices for yourself by yourself. You are creating a joint life that's built of all the decisions you now make together.

You're not just making choices for yourself by yourself.

While everyone has to make decisions – literally hundreds a day – it's the big ones that usually cause problems. Which toothpaste to use, which road to take to

work, which gas station to stop at, are things that can be decided independently and without much stress. Which place to live, which job to take, whether to have another child, not so much. That's when you want to have the tools to make good, clear, and mutually agreeable decisions.

Mistakes Were Made...

As you look over the decisions you have already made, there may be some that you would choose to do differently if you could do them over. That's okay. It just means that you have the capacity to learn from your mistakes. Every choice you make will not be the right one, but making decisions together and taking into consideration as many factors as you can think of will reduce the number (and

hopefully some of the pain) of poor decisions. But there are probably also many decisions that you can pat yourself on the back for. You probably feel good about deciding to pursue a relationship with the person you're now married to. Many other areas of your life are likewise marked by good decisions and the results that have come from them.

See Sharing as an Asset

Making choices can be a burden, and being married allows you to share the load. The path your life takes from now on will be one the two of you carve out. You have another person who will weigh in on future life decisions. Your partner may

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How To's of Decisions (continued from page 1)

1. Be honest – It is very hard to make a mutually satisfying decision if you keep some pieces of information to yourself. For instance, if you can't swim and hate the water, then be open about it when your spouse brings up the idea of a cruise. Sometimes we aren't proud to trot out our fears or previous bad experiences, but if they help us make a good, clear decision, we need to trust our partner and be open.

2. Draw up a list – Put down all the positives and negatives that you can think of around the decision at hand. What are the good things about moving far away? What are the bad things? Each of you will have your own take on these (maybe something on your "good" list will show up on your spouse's "bad" list) but it will help to clarify what your values are around the choice at hand.

3. Consult others – If it seems appropriate, consult with those who might have information that would help you make a more informed opinion.

4. Don't assume – Check out what you think your spouse is thinking to make sure if it is accurate. Again, back to the house shows, you won't know how important an



element of a decision is unless you ask. Is it of the highest importance that you live near family, or just desirable?

5. Let go of past mistakes – No couple has a perfect score on making decisions, so let the ones that didn't work out so well go. Often even mistakes have elements in them you can learn from, which makes some "bad" decisions really only partly bad. Besides, bringing up the past may make your partner defensive and create a difficult climate for making the current decision.

6. Be flexible – Don't try to sell your partner on your idea, or point out the worst features of their side. Can you remember a decision you were initially against that turned out better than you thought?

7. Be respectful – This is the most important element of every interaction in your marriage. You are trying to do the best thing for your marriage, so do it with respect for each other and for all opinions expressed.

8. Weight The Choice – If one of you wants something very badly and the other doesn't feel like it's that important, weigh the passion as well as the merit of the choice. If one person wants a trip to Disney World, for example, and the other is not excited about it but also not opposed to it, then let the strength of the desire be part of the equation. Sometimes it's worth giving in to something your spouse really wants. The gratitude factor can be very nice!

One Choice at a Time

Of course the home improvement shows are just TV, but the couples in the shows always seem to come out happy with the decisions they made. We build our lives one choice at a time, so use the best building blocks you can when making big decisions. ■



Exercise

How do we do with making decisions?

	Yes	No	I don't know
We have a policy about buying things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have talked about how to handle telephone sales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We've talked about where to live	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We've talked about pets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We talked about how to relate to our families (where to go on holidays, for example)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We've talked about when and how many children to have	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What has been our biggest decision to date?			

We handled it well

Next time here are some things I think we should try:



Shared Decision Making – The Married Kind (continued from page 1)

help you clarify the factors in your decisions and give you new things to consider. While sharing decisions may limit you in some ways (you can't just pick up and move across the country) it will also lighten the burden of making decisions. Your partner not only has another voice but also a whole set of experiences and past decisions that he or she can bring to bear on current choices.

The School of Decision-making

Like many other behaviors, the process of decision-making is based largely on the messages we learned in our family of origin. Can you picture how your parents came to decisions? Do you see any similarities between their approach and the way you generally make decisions? Does it seem to you that your spouse makes decisions the way his/her family comes to decisions? If the styles you learned were very different, it will be a challenge to craft your own joint style, because it will undoubtedly mean letting go of a familiar process.



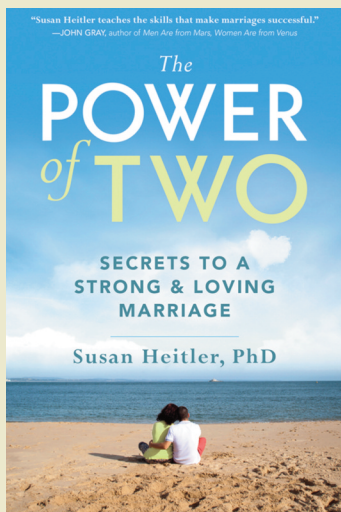
Getting a Handle on it

Do you remember when you were a kid, learning to ride a bike? You probably fell a lot, in the beginning, but you got better and better as you practiced. Pretty soon you were saying, "Look, ma, no hands!" As it gets easier to succeed, it also seems to get more fun. Learning how each of you

makes decisions, and how you can best make decisions together is a wonderful, lifelong skill, like riding a bike. There is no reason to stay locked in a place where making decisions is difficult and filled with anxiety. You could be looking forward to a time when you can say to each other, "Look, honey, no stress." ■

The Power of Two: Secrets to a Strong & Loving Marriage

By Susan Heitler



This book has a very entertaining and enlightening chapter on making decisions. The entertaining part is that it contains a chart that talks about the kind of decisions that cause arguments in terms of a dog's behavior as well as human behavior.

The enlightening part is that there are some good tips in the chapter for the kind of decisions we are talking about here – not conflicts, just things that need one common decision. Will we move? Do we want to buy this house? Is it time to have a baby?

Dr. Heitler suggests a three-step process:

1. Express your initial positions. "I like this house because it's set back from the road and we will have some privacy." "I don't like that it has only one bathroom."
2. Explore underlying concerns. "Remember when we had that couple next to us in our rental that argued all the time? It really bothered me." "I do remember that, and I agree some space from neighbors would be good. But we both wanted a house with more than one bathroom so that when we have guests we can give them their privacy."
3. Choose a mutually satisfying solution. "Let's look at some other houses and see if there's one that meets both of our requirements. If not we can come back to this one and find a solution."

Check out *The Power of Two...* to see the process in more detail!

Spirituality



You know that Mary, the mother of Jesus, has a very special place in the Catholic religion, and she has been given many different titles that highlight different aspects of her gifts. She is called the morning star, mediatrix of all graces, queen of peace, refuge of sinners, Our lady of good counsel, and so many, many more! Pope Francis has a devotion to a little known title, and that is Mary, Untier of Knots.

A painting with a history

The devotion is depicted by an early 17th-century painting showing Mary undoing the knots in a long rope. The painting was commissioned by a nobleman, Hieronymus Ambrosius Langenmantel, to give thanks to Mary for saving the marriage of his grandparents. Mary is untying the knots that had caused the once happy marriage to become tangled and difficult.

The rest of the story

According to a historical account by Mario Iberris Rivera, the nobleman Wolfgang Langenmantel was married to Sophie Imhoff (1612) and they were on the verge of divorce. He paid a visit to

Mary wants us to be happy in our marriage, wants to have us have the loving and close union marriage can be. She is there to smooth out the wrinkles and tangles in our relationship and help us move forward together.

Father Jacob Rem SJ, who prayed before an image of the Virgin Mary. Father Rem spoke these words: “In this religious act, I raise the bonds of matrimony, to untie all knots and smoothen them.” And immediately peace was restored between the couple.

Untying the difficulties in making decisions

While the devotion has been known for a while, the relevance to marriage has just recently come to the fore. Mary wants us to be happy in our marriage, wants to have us have the loving and close union marriage can be. She is there to smooth out the wrinkles and tangles in our relationship and help us move forward together.

Asking for help

Working out big decisions can sometimes cause those wrinkles. In addition to the psychological and behavioral tools we know about, spiritual tools are also available to us. Asking God’s help, or Mary’s help, is yet another way to feel supported in coming to a good conclusion – one that honors our needs and the needs of our spouse. ■

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A publication of S&K Publishers in partnership with the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers.
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