

*Ready for more joy, intimacy, and respect
in your relationship?*

It's Not You, It's Us: A Guide for Living Together Without Growing Apart

by Sophie Winters

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IT'S NOT YOU IT'S US

*A Guide for Living Together
Without Growing Apart*



SOPHIE WINTERS

Author of *The Dating Man-ifesto*

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ISBN: 978-1-63492-308-8

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2017

First Edition – September 2015
Second Edition – March 2017

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Also by Sophie Winters

The Cha Cha Club Dating Man-ifesto

Forty Daze (as Adele Frizzell)

DISCLAIMER

The disclaimer is the “awkward conversation” we need to have at the outset to ensure we’re on the same page.

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This book provides content related to relationship topics. As such, use of this book implies your acceptance of this disclaimer.

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Dear Reader



In his book, *Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married*, Gary Chapman says that love has two stages. In the first stage, you get caught up in the heady rush of romance, hormones, and sex. You're euphoric, in love, and the rest of the world doesn't matter. You think you've found 'the One'. This stage normally lasts six months to two years. And yet, according to Chapman, the next stage is, "much more intentional than the first stage. And yes, it requires work in order to keep emotional love alive". The rewards are huge though. You become more deeply connected, emotionally intimate and full of love for one another, far beyond the initial euphoria that swept you along.

It's Not You, It's Us: A Guide for Living Together Without Growing Apart walks readers through what it takes to build and maintain a deeply satisfying and lasting relationship. It explains how to create a relationship in which both partners feel safe to be themselves, so they continue to grow as individuals, and as a couple.

This is a book to help couples who are planning to move in together, couples who are already living together or couples who are married – to be happier and more successful. It explores multiple topics like the legal differences between living together and being married, mixed-faith unions, having kids and pets, sex and desire, division of labor, money, family issues, personal growth and happiness, emotional distance, privacy and personal space, conflict, and other issues. I haven't come across another relationship book that explores so many subjects in one go. Whole books could be written on just "Money" or "Blended Families" – and

have been. Due to the sheer breadth of the topics covered, I provide a list of references and some recommended reading if you wish to learn more about a subject.

It's Not You, It's Us: A Guide For Living Together Without Growing Apart draws real world examples from my own relationships, other couples, family therapists, a documentary filmmaker, and other authors and experts. More than an advice book, there are exercises at the end of most chapters so you can immediately take action on what you've learned.

Feel free to read the chapters in any order you like, and skip sections that you don't connect with. You can always return to them some other time. However, I recommend you read this guidebook with your partner. Perhaps you can take turns reading each chapter out loud and doing the exercises together. I guarantee that doing this will spark some juicy conversations and increase understanding between you. Think you know your partner? Well, you're about to find out!

If you find this book helps you in any way, please send me an email and/or leave a review. I love to hear from my readers and it would be great to know what parts stood out for you the most. After all, I wrote this book for *you*.

I truly believe in helping people get more love in their lives, starting with themselves.

May you live together without growing apart.

Introduction



*We are our best selves when we are treated with love,
whether it's from ourselves or others.*

– Georgie Fear

After my book, *The Cha Cha Club Dating Man-ifesto* was published, I had the strongest feeling that I would meet an amazing man within a year.

Maybe that's because writing a dating and relationship book made it crystal clear what kind of man I wanted to date and let into my life. I was keenly aware that I had to follow my own advice if I wanted to attract a Quality Man. I don't think it's any coincidence that seven months after I published my first book, I found one.

Tex was unlike any man I had ever dated. He was an American, an oil and gas engineer working and living in Canada. We met through a dating site and dated for a couple of months before going exclusive. He wasn't a commitment-phobe: he told me right from the beginning he wanted to get married again (someday) and thought he was a better man in a relationship. He had a ten-year-old daughter who lived with her mother and new stepfather in Colorado. I had never been married. I had never dated a Dad before. I had never met a man who talked liked that.

Tex was Christian: I wasn't. Tex was from Texas: I was from Canada. Tex was passionate and I was cautious – at first. I felt

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attracted to him but made him (and me!) wait for sex. I wanted to be sure he was right for me without hormones clouding my judgment. After dating for a couple of months, we decided to be exclusive and take down our online dating profiles. Then we sealed the deal in a tent in Yellowstone National Park. Romantic? I know...but for an outdoorsy Canadian person like me, it was perfect. We had driven across the country to meet each other: he from Colorado, and I on my motorcycle all the way from Alberta, Canada.

After four months of being exclusive, our relationship was tested for the first time. My father died of a massive stroke. Tex drove 600 kilometers (that's about 400 miles for you Americans) to be with me. He took several days off of work to support me at the hospital and at the memorial service. He was there before, during, and after my father passed away. Tex dried my tears, held me, and comforted me through the grieving process. He was my rock, and I knew then, without a doubt, I'd found a man who wasn't just good to me; he was good FOR me.

When Tex's company told him they wanted to move him back to the United States, he asked me to move with him.

I had never truly considered leaving my mountain town – my paradise – for a man before. But I couldn't imagine my life without him.

I said yes.

Seven months after meeting for the first time, we were living together in Washington, DC. Three months later, Tex was having his own personal crisis.

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I could sense him distancing himself from me. He no longer reached for me in bed. He no longer texted me during the day. He became prickly. Where was my sweet, adoring man?

I wanted to know what was wrong. We talked, and he told me he was questioning “us” and needed his own space and didn’t know how to handle that. It made him feel guilty just thinking about it. He missed the days when we were dating, and only saw each other on weekends and could give each other 100%, because we had our own separate lives all week. He had a lot going on in his head. Had we moved in together too soon? Where was this relationship going? He wasn’t even sure he wanted to get married again or was suited for it.

My man had developed a case of ice-cold feet.

Thanks to John Gray¹, I knew this was the “resistance stage” at work in our relationship, so I didn’t freak.

¹John Gray identifies five stages to intimacy. The five stages are Attraction, Uncertainty, Exclusivity, Intimacy, and Engagement. One of these stages is the “uncertainty stage”. It’s when you work through inevitable doubts about your relationship. If you don’t have doubts, you’re probably deluded. John Gray, “My 5 Stages of Dating”, <http://www.marsvenus.com>.

At the same time, I couldn’t help feeling anxious: I had moved to the United States for this man. I had taken a big leap of faith in us. Despite the fact that I had sworn I’d never again move in with a man without a ring on my finger, I’d gone ahead and done it anyway. Why? Because we both knew we couldn’t date if we lived 2000 miles apart. Without more time together, we would never know the true nature of our relationship and our level of compatibility. So, we found an apartment and merged our possessions – and lives – together. It was scary. It was exciting. It was what we both wanted. But now he was uncertain!

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And he knew all this, and he just felt more guilty. The last thing I wanted was for my man to feel guilty. I wanted him to be motivated and inspired to be with me, not obligated.

So, I decided to be patient and wait it out in the hope he would come around.

It required more faith than I was used to having in a relationship.

I wrote the following diary entry:

...Tex and I are re-calibrating. I recently found out that I can't get a work visa, so unless we get married, I have to leave the U.S. in September (for six months). It puts a little pressure on us, which neither of us wants right now. Also, not having an income sucks. I am totally dependent on Tex now. I wish I could contribute in some meaningful way but short of keeping the place tidy (he does his own laundry) and cooking and trying out new recipes (he also cooks), I have a lot of time on my hands. What else? I miss my mountains, my community, and my money. I miss my friends and having a strong purpose each day.

My challenge is to recreate myself here and start over. And while Tex is all I have at the moment, it's important I give him some space and not cling too tightly. And so, I go to yoga at night, or a movie, or a meetup, so he can have the apartment and a little time to himself because he works all day and doesn't need to come home and find me here all the time. So right now, things aren't easy, but I am doing my best to settle in, get fit, get a life, and use my time productively.

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We were both in a new city, without friends, new to living together, and trying to figure it all out. We were living together but felt more apart than ever.

Eventually, we figured it out and fell more in love than ever.

Here's how.

Chapter 1: The Happy Couple



Most people spend far more time in preparation for their vocation than they do in preparation for marriage. Therefore, it should not be surprising that they are more successful in their vocational pursuits than they are in reaching the goal of marital happiness.

— Gary Chapman, *Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married*

Happily Ever After?

In the book *Outliers*, author Malcolm Gladwell states that it takes roughly 10,000 hours of practice to achieve mastery in a field. This theory is currently getting hammered by academics, but the message is clear: spend enough time doing something, and you'll get good at it. If we are to believe Gladwell, after four years of marriage (assuming seven hours a day are spent together), we should all be experts at cohabitation. And yet, that is rarely the case. It would seem that **mindful practice and dedication to a skill are key to mastery**. A so-called perfect union takes dedication to master. And without commitment, practice, or mentors to show us what that looks like, the challenge is impossible.

Questions: What Does It Take to Live Happily Ever After?

1. Why are some couples happier than others?
2. How did they get that way?
3. Did they simply choose the right partner while others chose poorly?
4. How do they stay connected while other couples seem to drift apart?
5. Do happy people have a greater chance of keeping intimacy, love, and affection alive in their relationships?
6. How can couples help each other become their best, happiest selves?
7. Is some people's lack of marital happiness possibly due to the nearly exclusive focus on extrinsic goals?

These are some of the questions I've asked myself over the years, and the answers are in this book. They may not be complete, but they are the start of a conversation about love and what it takes to live together without growing apart. I invite you to join me. My contact details, including my website and email, are at the end. Let me know how this information lands for you.

I'm not a therapist; I don't have an academic degree in this stuff. However, I do have research and observation skills, as well as wisdom and experience. I have learned from my own parents' troubled relationship and I draw from eight years of a "living

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together” relationship that went splitsville. I can also draw contrasts to the incredibly loving, healthy relationship I am in now.

I don't have 10,000 hours of experience; I have three decades. I made my share of mistakes along the way. Hopefully, this book will spare you some of those mistakes.

Now you may be tempted to read this book in a few sittings. Feel free to do so but I think you will get more out of it if you come back to it and take the time to read this book with your partner. Designate one day a week to read a chapter together and discuss it. There are 25 chapters, and most will take fifteen minutes to read. You can even take turns reading the book aloud to one another. **Read the book, and do the exercises together, and your relationship could be completely transformed six months from now.** In fact, your relationship could start transforming from the very first chapter.

Action expresses priorities.

— Mahatma Gandhi

Living Together before Marriage

In my last book, *The Cha Cha Club Dating Man-ifesto*, I suggested that couples not live together before getting engaged or married, if marriage is truly what a person wants. This wasn't for religious reasons, but to provide clarity about a relationship and where it's headed before becoming legally, financially, and emotionally entangled. About 60% of cohabitating couples will not marry within three years. Reading this book will help you more fully comprehend your situation and its risks.

I can see the benefits of living together before marriage: you get to know each other's habits and quirks to a much greater degree. When you're living together, you can only hide the less shiny

aspects of your personality for so long. If one of you has a mood disorder or addiction issues, that stuff will come out. Living together means figuring out what you can live with. But there are other reasons to live together first and some of them are logistical.

For Tex and me, living together was simply practical. We needed more run time together before getting married. We had only dated for six months when his company moved him back to the United States. To us, there was no way to sustain a dating relationship with 2000 miles separating us. So, we decided to live together first. It has given us more confidence that we are compatible and right for one another. We're ready now. Life has thrown us some big challenges in the last year – the death of my father; the passing of his father figure; illness; surgery; financial worries; career changes; moving countries; separation for months at a time – and we've never wavered in our commitment to and love for one another. Did we ever question our relationship? Certainly. But only in rare moments, like just before I moved in with him, or after spending months apart had caused us to emotionally disconnect, or when he still hadn't put a ring on it after a year of living together, and I began to wonder where things were going. Normal. Healthy.

PEARLY WISDOM: There will be times in your relationship, especially if it endures long-distance periods, when you may question your feelings for your partner. You may look at this person you're supposed to love, as if they are a stranger. You may feel disconnected. You may feel a hollowness to the "I love you"s. You may even come to question your relationship. Let me assure you: this is normal. If there is no anger or resentment, just a flatness to things, the feelings and love will come back. Do not think you have to be "on" all the time. Love is like waves, so ride the tide. (And if you can talk about what's happening between you and why, you just may find the love coming back more quickly. That's because nothing is sexier and more energizing to a relationship than authenticity.)

Really want to get to know a person? Observe them under stress and see how they handle it. And that takes time. Very few people consider how important grit is to a relationship when they begin to date someone. As we get older, we learn that suffering is a part of life and misfortune will strike not once, but several times. The ability to bear these events with grace and resilience is an often-overlooked virtue in a partner.

When I was in my twenties, **I didn't consider how important grit was to a relationship.** I looked for things we had in common. If a guy liked the outdoors and had the same music tastes, he was dating material. But I never really considered whether he had the kind of internal strength required in a relationship. **I never considered whether my partner was good for me.** The kind of guy who won't run at the threat of conflict. The kind of guy who will stay faithful after three months apart. The kind of guy who will say, "Let me be your rock," when you feel like you cannot bear the pain of grief.

It doesn't always take living together to figure out a person's character. All you need is time to see how your sweetheart deals with life's more painful aspects, such as losing a job, dealing with grief or illness, or struggling with financial hardship. The truly great ones won't succumb to drama, despair, or addiction. The truly great ones will love you through it all and bear it with grit and hope. Living together means you get to experience it all first-hand.

Guideline #1: When looking for a life partner, look for someone who is resilient in the face of adversity.

Risk of Divorce

Let's bust some myths about living together and divorce first.

Q: Does living together before marriage lead to a higher risk of divorce later on?

Good news for those who may have heard that living together before marriage increases the risk of divorce: it's BS. In a 2013 study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* by associate professor Arielle Kuperberg, it was found that there is no correlation between living together before marriage and divorce.²

Current research shows that cohabitation doesn't cause divorce – and probably never did.*

**I have placed all remaining references at the end of the book, in the Endnotes section to maintain readability. You may also notice that I use “he” and “she” interchangeably and use “they” and “their” to be gender inclusive. I bold certain words and sentences. This is not an error: I do it to draw attention to important ideas. Finally, feel free to replace the word, “marriage” with “living together” whenever it suits you.*

Q: What is the greatest predictor of divorce?

According to several studies, age and income level are the greatest predictors of divorce.³ **The lower the age and income at the time of marriage, the greater the risk of divorce.**⁴ Marrying before the age of 25 is a terrible risk, no matter how “in love” you are right now; half of young marriages end in divorce. The message? Don't settle down too early. Go to school, get some marketable skills, check a few items off your bucket list, and then get married. That goes for both men and women.

Research may indicate that the very best age to marry is between 28 and 32, but it's not so much that there is a magical number that will safeguard you from divorce as much as it's about having the life experience, self-awareness, and financial resources to weather the demands of marriage.

Q: What about marital satisfaction? Does living together before marriage guarantee greater satisfaction later?

Sadly, no. It would seem that living together before marriage doesn't contribute to a more blissful union, although there is some data indicating that women are happier married than cohabiting – for social and cultural reasons, and possibly due to greater feelings of security overall. There is also some data to support that married men have more successful careers and live longer than their unmarried counterparts.

Q: So why live together before marriage?

Well, for couples like Tex and me, living together is a stepping stone to marriage, a chance to see how compatible we really are and a necessity due to geographical distance. For others, living together is a viable alternative to getting married. However, cohabitation does come with some risks, which I explore in the chapter on “Covering Your Ass(ets)”.

What Can We Do to Be Happier?

Just because a couple is still together after a few years doesn't mean they're happy.

When I look at couples, at least a third of them seem miserable or lacking in love and affection... or just kind of *meh*. Sometimes, I even get the impression they irritate the hell out of each other and wish they could be left alone. I feel pained when I hear these kinds of couples talk to each other. The contempt and disrespect are palpable.

Which makes me wonder: How many of these people are together out of necessity, or for the kids, or due to religious or cultural

pressure, instead of love and desire? How many relationships are surviving rather than thriving?

For some people, marriage is such a scary proposition that they would rather live together than risk divorce. But that's avoiding the heart of the issue. To me, the real question is not: Is living together better or worse than marriage? The real question is: How can we live together without growing apart?"

Chuck all the statistics and probabilities; I want a relationship that thrives. And since you're holding this book in your sweet little hands, I'm sure you do too.

We all want to be loved. We all want to be happy. Problem is, we're not always sure what that looks like, or how to get there. This book is a start.

PEARLY WISDOM: Early happiness determines future success. The better a couple gets along in the beginning of a relationship, the better their chances of continued happiness later on. Research indicates that happy couples, after years of marriage, were far happier at the beginning, while unhappy couples had far more problems right from the start.

To me, a happy couple is affectionate and respectful of one another. They light up around each other, laugh easily and show enthusiasm in each other's company. Most importantly, they support and respect each other. They constantly share new experiences together. They act like a team.

Guideline #2: If you're choosing to share your life with someone, give some thought as to *how* you're going to be happy together.

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I don't know about you, but I don't want to just grow old with someone. I want to become more, do more, see more, feel more, love more, and laugh more than I ever would have on my own.

How about you? What does your relationship look like to other people?

Think about every couple you know.

How many of them seem happy together?

What does happy look like to you?

Kiley writes:

My parents! They joke about their differences, make fun plans together, but also give each other space to follow their own interests.

Guideline #3: One sure-fire way to spot a happy couple: they laugh together.

Like before Love

Many couples who say they love each other actually treat each other horribly. Let me ask you this: Would you complain and talk about your friend behind their back? Would you criticize and belittle them in front of others? Would you avoid spending time with them? This is how some couples behave – like enemies.

Guideline #4: You need to like each other in order to properly love each other.

Keeping Romantic Love Alive

At one time, I was a bit cynical about love. I used to think that romantic love never lasted. That it was all fun and games until the honeymoon phase was over, and after that it was downhill. Unless you were one of the very lucky ones – like the rare old couple you see still holding hands in public. Seems I was wrong, and that adoration can last a lifetime.

“Romantic love is more common than people tend to think, and it certainly doesn’t need to end once a relationship enters its mature years”, says Theresa E. DiDonato, Ph.D., in her article “The 3 Simple Habits That Predict Long-term Love”.⁵ DiDonato summarizes the work of researchers in a study that asks, “Is long-term love more than a rare phenomenon? If so, what are its correlates?”⁶

The study outlines three behaviors and beliefs that lead to feelings of passion and romantic love. Men and women who are intensely in love:

- Think positively about one’s partner.
- Think about one’s partner when not with that person.
- Have an affectionate relationship (hugging, kissing, holding hands).

A Harvard presentation on the Psychology of Close Relationships⁷ draws similar conclusions. In a nationwide controlled study of couples in the United States married at least ten years and an average of 20 years, couples that were very intensely in love:

- Are physically affectionate.
- Think positively about their spouse.
- Share in enjoyable, engaging activities.

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While Tex and I have a young relationship, we both know that experiencing new things and being physically affectionate is an aphrodisiac for us. The natural outcome of these activities is to think fondly about one another when we're not together.

The Harvard findings conclude that while some relationships will decline, “the ones that do, tend to be troubled from the start. Couples can and do have deeply happy, passionate, romantic relationships after decades”. Indeed, about one in three marriages that have lasted over 30 years are still very much in love. How wonderful is that?

Tex says he'll still slap my ass when I'm 70 years old. I am holding him to it. Because ass-slapping may be one of the keys to a love that lasts.

But it's only one of the keys.

The Happy Couple

More interestingly, DiDonato says that analysts observed a “relation between general life happiness and intense love for a spouse”.

Did you catch that? Happiness with one's life is highly linked to a happy relationship.

It is a cliché to say no one can make you happy but it's an absolute truth. Once you assume responsibility for your own happiness, it becomes the tide that lifts all ships. I talk about this more in Chapter 16 – Personal Growth and the Pursuit of Happiness.

For now, here's a teaser: If you want a happy relationship, you must first be happy with your own life.

Your level of contentment is the result of the choices you make, the thoughts you hold, and the actions you take each day. By cultivating an attitude of gratitude, finding purpose and meaning to your life, and having a positive relationship with yourself, you nurture a joyful spirit and high self-esteem.

High self-esteem is a huge predictor of relationship and life satisfaction, since how you see yourself and your partner matters a great deal. Self-esteem influences your perception of events and even your commitment and communication during conflict. If both partners have high levels of self-esteem, your relationship has the best possible chance of long-term happiness.

Like a stone thrown into a pond, happiness begins with you and ripples outward.

PEARLY WISDOM: It's a cliché because it's true: no one can "make" you happy – that's your job in life. It is a noble calling, and we are each called to it in our own way. The challenge is to find someone who will support your journey, even if they don't share in it.

Guideline #5: Long-term happiness and love is an inside job. It starts with YOU.

Roko Belic's Lessons about Happiness

There is a documentary film called Happy, which I think everyone should watch. The film explores the "true sources and causes of happiness", according to director Roko Belic. Roko has kindly allowed me to share the following article about the lessons he learned about happiness while making the film. I think his advice could help relationships everywhere.

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A dirt-poor rickshaw puller in a slum in India once told me that he was the luckiest person alive. His hut was made out of bamboo sticks and plastic tarps, with raw sewage trickling out front, but still, Manoj Singh said he was happy, very happy, in fact. Though sometimes he had only a few bowls of rice to feed his family, he said, "I feel that I am not poor, but I am the richest person in the world".

How could this be? I have friends who can become unhappy by bad cell phone reception or a delayed flight.

*For the past six years, I have been making a documentary film called *Happy*, exploring the true sources and causes of happiness. My crew and I traveled to 14 countries and talked to people from many different cultures. Old and young, rich and poor, they taught us about happiness. We also spoke with many of the leaders in the field of positive psychology, the scientific study of happiness.*

What I learned changed my life.

1. You can Become Happier

There are a number of ways we can increase our happiness. The formula for happiness is not the same for everyone, but all of us can make changes to become healthier, more fulfilled and happier.

2. Your Happiness is Good For You

Happy people are more likely to have better relationships and have happier children. Happy people

do better at school and at work and make more money. They are more creative, more resilient in the face of hardship, healthier and they even live longer.

3. Your Happiness is Good For the World

Happiness is contagious. As you become happier, those around you have a higher likelihood of becoming happier. Happy people are less likely to cheat someone else, commit a crime or pollute the environment. They are more likely to help a stranger in need and stand up for justice and human rights. Happy people create a happy world.

Seven Things You Can Do to Become Happier (Roko Belic)

1. Get in the Flow

Flow is a state of being where you are totally immersed in an activity. You forget about the worries of everyday life and you are completely focused on the experience of the moment. Flow usually occurs while engaging in a hobby like gardening, painting, golfing or surfing, but it can also happen at work. People who get into flow on a regular basis are happier than those who don't.

What to do: *Recognize your flow-inducing hobbies and prioritize them.*

2. Integrate Exercise into Your Day

We have a chemical in our brain called dopamine that is essential for feelings of pleasure and happiness. It is part of a system of transmitters and receptors that

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deteriorates as we get older (past teenage years). The best way to maintain the health of our dopamine systems is through physical aerobic exercise.

What to do: *Find something aerobic that you like to do and prioritize it in your schedule. Some ideas are biking, dancing, running, tennis, basketball, walking.*

3. Spend time with Friends and Family

Ed Diener, a leading researcher in positive psychology, told me that every happy person he studied in over 30 years had strong relationships. Not all were outgoing or necessarily very social, but all had someone they loved and someone who loved them back.

What to do: *Make time to spend with your friends and family on a regular basis.*

4. Focus on Intrinsic Goals

People who prioritize “extrinsic” values for money, power and fame are less likely to be happy than people who prioritize “intrinsic” values for compassion, cooperation and wanting to make the world a better place.

What to do: *Shift your priorities and your actions toward intrinsic goals.*

5. Be a Part of Something that Offers a Sense of Meaning and Purpose

Happy people often feel they are part of something bigger than themselves. Whether it's a community

service organization, a charity or a spiritual affiliation, participating in a group or identifying a context for your life can increase your happiness.

What to do: *Participate in an organization that reflects your values or do things that contribute to the legacy you want to leave.*

6. Act with Compassion

Being kind and helping others, even strangers, makes you happier.

What to do: *Take opportunities to be kind and offer help.*

7. Practice Gratitude

Writing a letter to thank someone can boost your happiness for days afterwards. The amazing part is: it works even if you don't send the letter! If you do send the letter, the positive impact is even greater. The simple act of expressing your gratitude makes you happier.

What to do: *Make a habit of thanking people who help you, and write a list once a week of things you are grateful for.*

Guideline #6: The quality of your relationships is a direct reflection of how you feel about yourself.

* * *

HOUSEKEEPING: Get Happy(er)

At the end of most chapters, I have included some “Housekeeping” items. Consider this section your homework for the week. If you read ahead, please come back and work on these items with (or without) your partner. Knowledge is nothing without application, and **your relationship will transform if you actually take the time to do the exercises and apply what you’ve learned.** If your partner is not willing or able to do some of the housekeeping items with you at the end of each chapter, then go ahead and do them yourself. Sometimes, it only takes one person to shift things for the better in a relationship.

Try not to do all the housework at once: one chapter per week is more than enough.

Let me know how it goes!

Task 1. Watch the movie *Happy* together.

You can rent it for a few dollars at www.thehappymovie.com. Get inspired!

Task 2. Get involved in something bigger than you.

If “happy people often feel they are part of something bigger than themselves”, what can you do as a couple, or individually, to participate in something that gives you a sense of purpose and contribution to a community?

For example, Tex and I deliver groceries once a month to cut-off seniors who are facing poverty and social isolation. It’s a four-hour time commitment once a month, but our small visit means the world to these lonely seniors. The visits mean a lot to us too. We also feel closer and more connected to each other afterwards.

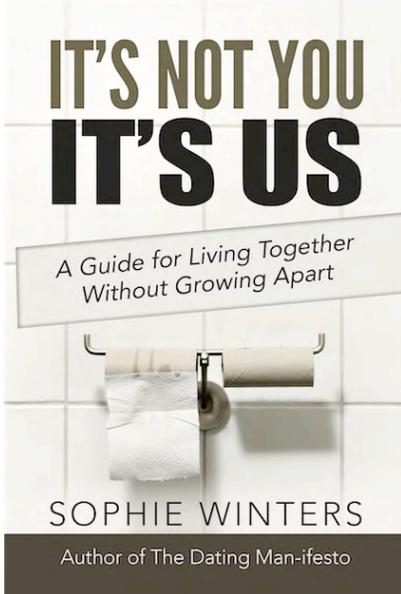
If you would like to become more involved in your community, consider volunteering through your church or neighborhood, or through organizations like volunteermatch.org, where we found our cause. Volunteermatch has thousands of listings to bring good people and causes together, and there is no cost to join.

Task 3: Reread Roko Belic's lessons about happiness.

If you have some juice in you, go back to Roko Belic's lessons about happiness and reread his seven tips on what you can do to become happier. Find a way to implement them in your own life. You might want to journal about this.

I can't stress the importance of finding your own happiness enough. To rely on someone else to make you happy is giving your power and destiny away. **When you become the best person you can be, you are on your way to deep personal satisfaction with life. As you blossom, so do your relationships.** You become your wisest, happiest, and most loving self when you commit to your own happiness and find ways to be of value to others.

Guideline #7: Good relationships help you become your best self.



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