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The Power of a Positive Culture

How To BE A WIFE

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None of us is born knowing how to be a wife — it is a learned behavior. Sadly, many women are products of divorce or of conflict-ridden marriages and thus have no roadmap for love. That's the bad news. The good news is any woman can learn the art of love, regardless of her upbringing or circumstances. But to do so, she must first reject the cultural narratives all around us.

America has become a disposable society hell-bent on women's independence from men and even children. Should you or I become unhappy or dissatisfied during the course of our marriage, the answer is clear: leave.

Talk about sabotage! Who's *never* unhappy or dissatisfied? What does it even *mean* to be happy? And why should becoming a wife (or a husband, for that matter) guarantee one's happiness? Yet this

directive — “Life's too short, move on if you're unhappy” — is pervasive and directed specifically to women. So much so women divorce perfectly good husbands.

Our beliefs are an extension of the environment in which we have been raised. First we tell women to “never to depend on a man,” the implication being that men cannot be trusted and that marriage is a precarious institution. Then we insist biology isn't real. We go on and on about gender equality, pitting the sexes against one another as if life is a race and we are competing for the same exact life rather than complementary beings with individual needs and desires.

Finally, we tell women they're perfect just the way they are, while we routinely vilify men. Men are always the ones who are expected to change, as if they have been defective since birth. When a wife is unhappy, the assumption is that her husband has failed in some way. No one ever asks the wife what *she* might do better, or differently, when it comes to the relationship.

I'm not saying women are always to blame every time a marriage goes

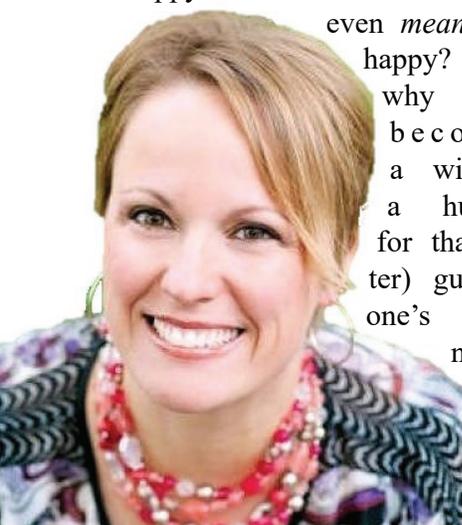
south. They are not. But female-driven divorce did not result from an overnight deluge of deadbeat husbands. *It resulted from the commonly held belief that women are not only superior to men, but are in fact better off without them.*

A belief is a powerful thing; it can either limit or broaden your life. If you have absorbed the cultural messages about men and marriage, you have almost certainly brought a competitive edge to your relationship. If so, you must get rid of it. When you harbor this attitude, you make it impossible for a man to love you. And when he doesn't, you, in turn, become resentful and angry. It's a vicious cycle.

To end it, some women seek help from marriage counselors. But all too often, these professionals echo the culture: leave if you're unhappy! Again, more sabotage. Where's the advice for women who are struggling with wifedom but who want to make the marriage work? Who will help them discern the difference between being unhappy and being unhappily married?

I've been a wife for more than twenty years. Not always a happy one, and never a perfect one. I was married once before in my twenties — four years, no kids — and have been remarried for almost 19 years

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(with two children). I am also a cultural critic. Over the past fifteen years, I have read hundreds of books, newspaper and magazine articles, scholarly papers, and blog posts on marriage and relationships, on work-family conflict, and on feminism and gender politics. I have attended conferences, given speeches, and written five books about these issues and have received scores of emails from men and women across the country and beyond.

I don't know everything, but this much I do know: *the culture in which we live is designed to make women fail as wives*. That's why to get it right women must reject the narratives that they have been sold about men and marriage. They must replace the negative beliefs with positive ones.

I know that sounds Pollyanna, but you'd be amazed what a simple shift in attitude can do. Here are four ideas to get you started:

Take divorce off the table. Live by the mantra 'this too shall pass.' Conflict is part of life; thus, all marriages will have multiple conflicts. When issues arise, stay focused on the problem and do not get mired in blame. This is more substantive than it seems, for the way you approach a conflict when you assume you and your spouse will be together 'until death do us part' is very different from the way you would approach it if you as-

sume you can leave. "The very option of being allowed to change our minds seems to increase the chances we *will* change our minds. When we can change our minds about decisions, we are less satisfied with them," writes Barry Schwartz in *The Paradox of Choice*.

Reject the green grass syndrome. Assume you will never get everything you want all wrapped up in one man (just as men will not get everything they want wrapped up in one woman). No matter whom we end up with, there will always be something missing. Always. "Research has shown that every happy, successful couple has approximately ten areas of 'incompatibility' or disagreement that they will never resolve . . . If we switch partners, we'll just get ten new areas of disagreement," writes Diane Sollee of SmartMarriages.com.

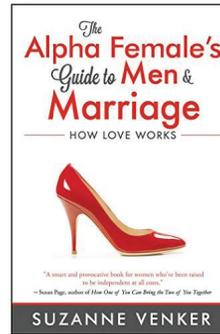
According to a recent survey of 1,000 married women, fifty percent — fifty percent! — of women have a "backup husband," a man who serves as a Plan B in case their marriage fails. Not only does this attitude create a self-fulfilling prophecy — preparing for the death of your marriage will inevitably lead to its death — these women have simply conjured *an image* of a better life. Nothing about

it is real. Thus, wives are comparing reality to fantasy.

Don't expect to be happy all the time. Happy wives do not look or act like those depicted in 1950s films and television. You do not have to don a clean apron or have your hair just so, nor do you need to smile all the time. Sometimes happy wives are not happy, but that doesn't mean that they are unhappily married. Life is a roller coaster: sometimes you're happy, and sometimes you're not. Smart wives enjoy the ride. They stay focused on *what is* rather than be allured by the *what-ifs*.

Take a more traditional view of marriage whether you work outside the home or not. Do not undermine your husband's masculinity. Instead, emphasize your softer, more vulnerable side — and your more intuitive emotional skills — rather than charging at, or competing with, your husband at every turn. Trust his judgment rather than tell him what to do. Know when to speak up and when to shut up, not because you "know your place" but because sometimes silence is golden. Sometimes letting your husband take the lead can land you precisely where you want to be.

My advice above is countercultural, I know, but it works. 



Welcome to *Eagle Forum Report*, the monthly newsletter for members of Eagle Forum. For fifty years, the founder of Eagle Forum and my mother, Phyllis Schlafly, wrote *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*. She always bragged that her newsletter contained more facts in fewer words. Eagle Forum is proud to continue her great work with our new monthly newsletter that is full of facts and no fluff. My mother said many times to me that the new name of the monthly

newsletter should be *Eagle Forum Report*, the successor to *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*. Eagle Forum is the publisher of *Eagle Forum Report*.

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God bless you,
Anne Schlafly Cori
Chairman, Eagle Forum

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