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Finding the balance between “We” and “I”

Marriages are a merger – a combining of two lives (and then possibly a few more if you add children into the equation and form a family) — but since you are two separate and unique people, how do you find balance between being a couple (“We”) and your sense of self (“I”)?

Some people are thrilled with the idea of “two becoming one,” while others may be a little worried that once they marry they will be viewed only as part of a couple and no longer as an interesting individual, or that they will have to give up too much of themselves to please the other person.

In my experience, a healthy merger comes from having a few realistic expectations about your relationship:

Realistic expectation #1: *You will not always be on the same page.* Because we are unique individuals, we will not always like or agree with our partner. In the early stages of a relationship, when we are infatuated with each other, we typically feel very connected to our partner - like we are one. There is a strong sense of validation that we are “worthwhile” and “lovable” because this other person thinks similarly about and wants many of the same things. We are adored and adore back. Remember, during this initial stage we tend to discount or ignore the dissimilarities. Then reality creeps back in (disillusionment) and we realize that as much as we love this other person, we can be out of sync in our opinions. The most important thing to remember is that this is totally normal and healthy. A quality relationship is based on respecting and tolerating those differences.

Realistic expectation #2: *You will have to compromise.* I think most people realize that they will need to make compromises when they marry but often they are unprepared for the amount of compromising they will have to do or how to get past the disagreements when there is no 50-50 solution. The simple answer is that sometimes you have to “give in” with the hope that at some point your partner will do the same for you. A few of my colleagues and I like to call this “giving a gift” to your relationship. For example, your spouse may give up an activity he/she really wants to do in order to join you at an activity he/she could not care less about, knowing how important it is to you. Be aware when this happens and remember it the next time you are asked to do the same. Most couples are satisfied in their relationships when they feel there is balance of the give-get ratio.

Realistic expectation #3: *Your partnership has limits.* No one person can be expected to take care of everything we need. There is nothing wrong with wanting or needing your partner to be there for you. We are, after all, social creatures and we learned many generations ago that we increase our survival when there are others in our tribe, so to speak. Just recognize that there will be times, even in the happiest of relationships, where your spouse will not be available or willing to help you with your request. It is at those times that you need to figure out how to get what you want on your own or from someone other than your partner. Do not perceive this as a lack of love or caring on the part of your spouse but rather as a normal part of being in a relationship.

Realistic expectation #4: *You don't have to “lose yourself” when you marry.* Even though your new married schedule may not allow for all of your “single” activities, it is still important to make time for self and to spend time with others. Remember that variety and novelty make for interesting conversation. Your partner was attracted to you as an individual long before you decided to become a team.

Balance is a concept I encourage people to think about. This will mean finding that balance between selfishness and self-sacrificing and between autonomy and dependence. When we are in balance we feel calm, content and centered. Find your balance for the sake of yourself and for your relationship. **DEBORAH ANDERSON PhD**