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life advice

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Living Your Own Life

Why it's important to be yourself and do what makes you happy in order to have a stronger marriage.

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In life, there are very few rules that you have to follow. Find what makes you happy.

There you are sitting in a rowdy bar on a Friday afternoon after work not because you particularly want to, but because, "Hey, it's Happy Hour, everybody goes."

Or you always go along with whatever sport or hobby your spouse wants to take up—even when you're not all that interested—because you're afraid he or she'd be put off if you didn't. However, you have this vague sense of constant discomfort. It's nothing you can really put your finger on, just this funny feeling that makes you want to ask, "Is this all there is to it? Is this all that life is about?"

Well, it depends on whose life you are living. If you are living a life you have consciously chosen, then life is about a great deal more. The problem is when you live life by default, that is to say, you're living a life according to someone else's choices and not your own.

"Huh?" you say, "That's nonsense, no one tells me what to do!"

Really? Then what are you doing spending Happy Hour being anything but happy? And whose choices are you living when you follow along behind your spouse's preferences instead of voicing your own?

One of the great joys of growing up is being able to do what when you want to do it. The sad thing is, we continue to behave as if we had to let someone else make our choices for us. The only difference is that there's no longer a parent standing over us saying, "You have to," but instead it's your internalized parent voice saying, "You have to," or our willingness to listen to others tell us how to live our lives.

Rebel! Establish your own guidelines for how you want to live your life. It's really OK and it's a great deal more satisfying.

For example, let's say you don't like happy hour, or bridal showers, or concerts, or whatever else it is you feel you "have to" go along with. Challenge yourself to come up with solutions that work for you. How else can you get a sense of belonging, how else can you create a network of friendships? Perhaps you can start a lunch club with fellow employees, or make special time to celebrate your friend's upcoming wedding in a more individual way, for example. Be willing to be different, in other words, be willing to live the life that fits you, not the one others think you should live.

If you don't like your job, either re-design how you do your job so you do find satisfaction in it or re-train for a job you will enjoy. Just because the current hot magazine says you should always do whatever your spouse does because you might lose him to some hottie, and then you'll be alone and . . . oh, please!

Your spouse loves you and wants what's best for you. Be brave, speak up and say, "I'm thrilled you enjoy hockey and I love to hear all about it, but other than that it's not really my thing, so I'll go visit with my friend while you're at the game and we'll meet up later at our favorite restaurant."

Figure out what matters to you, what brings you happiness in the long run, as well as the short term and have the courage to create a personalized life. In the process, ask yourself not just, "What do I want?" or, "What makes me happy?" but also, "Does this fit with who I am *becoming*?"

When you become an adult, you're the one who's in charge of growing up. It's good to remain conscious of that fact and keep yourself growing the way you want to, otherwise, you will simply grow willy-nilly in any old direction, much like a garden weed. If you ask, "Does this fit with who I am *becoming*?" you're making choices for yourself in the direction you want to be growing in, thus assuring not just present happiness, but future happiness as well.

The answer to, "Whose life is it anyway?" is most gratifying when it is a resounding "Mine!" Be willing to live according to who you are and watch all of the rewards it will bring.

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