

8 Marriage Lessons from Surprising Sources

Find out what insight the "other woman" can provide regarding your relationship

By Denise Schipani Posted January 21, 2011 from WomansDay.com



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Imagine for a moment (and we admit it might be an unpleasant moment) that you knew your husband had cheated on you. Now imagine that you have the opportunity to sit down with the other woman and find out, from her perspective, why he strayed. Would you do it? Before you recoil in horror, consider this: An imaginary other woman might be able to clue you in on what you're potentially neglecting in your marriage. Sure, "taking advice from the other woman is only addressing one level of your marriage's health," concedes Noelle Nelson, PhD, a relationship expert and author of *Your Man Is Wonderful*. But that said, "these are often things that the wife probably *used* to do—and should think about doing again." Here, eight little love lessons—from marriage experts, the other woman and a couple of cheating husbands.

1. Work on your own confidence. Patricia,* who is currently having an affair with a married man, cites her aura of self-confidence and self-reliance as one of the most alluring things about her. "Insecurity is a very unattractive trait," she says. "It's exhausting to be around." Similarly, don't worry about aging. "Women often get confused, believing that affairs happen as they get older, gain weight or are otherwise less physically attractive to their spouse," says Dr. Nelson. But men more often report having affairs to meet their emotional needs, irrespective of their wife's physical appearance.

What it means for you: Develop and maintain your own interests—from girls' nights out to reading the books and magazines *you* like—instead of expecting your husband to be everything for you, says Dr. Nelson. And take care of yourself for the sake of your health and self-esteem as much as a way to "keep" your man interested in you, she says.

2. Pay attention to him. Yes, it's that simple—and that complex, says Patricia. "If you try to justify your lack of attention and interest in your husband by saying, 'You know how much I love you, I don't have to do more,' think again." Giving your husband attention, she says, is powerfully addictive to him. Marriage and family therapist [Karen Ruskin](#), PsyD, agrees: "The main thing men report when they cheat is a lack of attention from their wives."

What it means for you: "When he talks, stop what you're doing and make eye contact. Don't let your to-do list be running through the back of your mind. Be fully present. Care about him and then take your turn," says Patricia.

3. Don't bottle up your anger or hide issues. "I cheated because when my wife and I were going through a hard time, she refused to see my side of issues regarding our children and remained angry with me. She wouldn't talk. Meanwhile, the woman I cheated with looked at me like I was a Greek god!" says John,* who is now divorced from his wife.

What it means for you: Discuss issues respectfully, without lashing out in anger.

4. Pump up your appreciation. In a long-term relationship, even when things are good, couples often let appreciation slide—you assume he *knows* you're grateful for the things he does. But men, in particular, like to know, explicitly, that the roles they play in your life and your home are not going unnoticed, says Dr. Ruskin.

What it means for you: "Don't let a day go by when you don't communicate what you appreciate about your spouse," says Dr. Ruskin. Be specific: "I'm so glad you can deal with the politics at your office so you can support the family" lets him know that you're grateful for the way he works. Something like, "Thanks for taking Jason to soccer every Saturday. I'm so pleased I married the kind of man who's really involved in the kids' activities" tells him you notice his fatherhood chops.

5. Don't toss out courtship as the years go on. Oh, who has time to *date*, much less to write romantic notes or buy sexy lingerie? You know who has time? The other woman. But what you have to remember is that "the other woman can do these things in short bursts, without the other commitments, namely your house, your kids and your finances," says Dr. Ruskin.

What it means for you: Try to remember that when you add those little courtship-like touches to a long-term marriage (a squeeze on the arm and kiss on the cheek when he's reading the paper, a short love note in his coat pocket, a special dinner plan), you're showing him that with you he's got the total package: the long-term history and commitment, *and* the sweet and sexy fun.

6. Have sex! "When my first wife and I were married, she used to tell me that I liked sex 'too much.' I felt bad, both physically and emotionally, for having a strong, healthy sex drive! I began to rationalize having one-night stands," says Bob Quinlan, who remained married (they separated and went through counseling) for 20 years before finally divorcing, and is now happily remarried and the author of [Earn It: Empower Yourself for Love](#).

What it means for you: It sounds simplistic, but it's a tenet of good marriages: Have sex. It's true that sexual desire waxes and wanes and that there are often mismatches between partners, but try to find common ground, says Dr. Ruskin. "You should have some physical closeness and contact at least once a week. Twice would be great. More is the exception—but at least it should be consistent." Another point, adds Quinlan: "Keep sex as an enjoyable, joyful part of your relationship, and don't withhold it as punishment," which only casts it in a negative light.

7. Put your marriage first. It can be hard for some women to remember that their marriage should be the first priority on their list, says Dr. Ruskin. The other woman has the advantage of being able to put her lover first—because she doesn't *have* the other distractions.

What it means for you: Continually remind yourself that the husband-wife relationship is primary. Get a babysitter and go out without parent guilt. Put the kids to bed early so you can snuggle on the couch together.

8. Be interested in his work, hobbies and accomplishments. You don't have to join him at the model train show, but asking him about it afterward is a smart idea. Same goes for his work: "One reason men often have affairs with women they work with is that there may be a woman at work who takes notice of his accomplishments and struggles," says Dr. Nelson. Imagine how it feels to him when he comes home to tell you how he saved the meeting from disaster, and you all but ignore him.

What it means for you: Take interest in what he's interested in, such as asking him to explain why that particular soccer game is important to the league, or flipping through his car magazine.

**These names have been changed.*