

CHICAGO BRIDE

5 ways to honor yourself in marriage

As wedding season approaches, soon-to-be brides are busy with cake tastings, guest lists and finding the perfect dress. But as we all know, marriage is much more than walking down the aisle and exchanging vows. It's a commitment to another person- a shift from life as a 'me' to life as a 'we.'

As an obedient, by-the-book housewife living a so-called 'perfect marriage,' I knew I wasn't happy. It wasn't until our divorce, however, that I realized I didn't even know what *did* make me happy. I had slowly lost touch with myself, gradually substituting my spouse's goals and desires for my own.

It took a while (and a journey around the world) to find myself and rediscover what I wanted out of life. It all left me thinking, 'Where did I go wrong? How did I get so lost?'

In the midst of wedding planning and honeymoon bliss, it's easy to only see a happy ending; but in reality, marriage takes work. It can't be all about you, but it can't be all about your spouse either. It's a balancing act of sorts.

So how can you stay true to yourself in marriage?

1. Set goals together as a couple and as individuals. As a couple, your goals might include buying a house, traveling to Europe or starting a family. But what about your personal goals, like obtaining your master's degree, starting your own business or running a marathon? Don't lose sight of the ambitions you have for yourself.
2. Use I statements. It's easy to get lost inside the 'we' mentality. Take time to evaluate your own thoughts and feelings, and try not to get caught up in statements such as "We love Chinese food" or "We hate bowling." It's pretty much a given that you and spouse won't agree on everything, so don't try to.
3. Learn to delegate. It can be easy to take a lot of tasks upon yourself- the cooking, cleaning and social calendar. As women, we typically perceive ourselves as being better at domestic tasks than men, so we often think it's necessary to handle these responsibilities ourselves. But in the end, we might end up feeling overwhelmed or taken advantage of. It's important to know when to ask for help. A marriage is a partnership, after all.
4. Pursue your passions. Don't let your own passions get masked by those of your spouse. Of course it's exciting to try new things and share passions together as a couple, but make sure you make time for your own interests as well.
5. Remember who you are. People change, but there are some characteristics like your humor, generosity or sense of adventure that truly define you. Don't lose yourself within your identity as a couple.

Barbara McNally is the author of Unbridled, a memoir chronicling her journey from stifled, predictable housewife to independent and joyous living. A mother and philanthropist living in San Diego, California, Barbara is also the founder of Mother, Lover, Fighter, Sage, a foundation inspired by her own journey and dedicated to providing women with opportunities for growth and self-discovery. Visit her website at <http://unbridledfreedom.com/>.

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