Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Guidelines and Strategies for Making This Life-Changing Decision as Clearly, as Positively and Confidently as Possible

David Steele
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or Should I Go?

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RCN Press
a division of Relationship Coaching Institute
P.O. box 111783, Campbell, CA 95011
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Foreword

This ebook is adapted from a transcribed live training workshop and is intended to provide objective and unbiased information and guidelines for decision-making about whether to stay in or leave a relationship. Effort has been made to clearly identify subjective statements as opinion. All stated opinions belong to the author and are not necessarily those of Relationship Coaching Institute, RCI leadership, staff and members. Sources of research findings mentioned in this ebook are listed in the Appendix.
Introduction

The question "Should I Stay or Should I Go" is the most difficult and painful dilemma I've ever experienced in my life, and resulted in two divorces. I wouldn't wish this kind of emotional torture upon anyone, but it comes up too often in my line of work. Unfortunately, there is no easy formula for answering this question, but over the years I've developed some approaches to addressing this challenging situation that have been helpful to my clients and the coaches we train at Relationship Coaching Institute and I'm hopeful these strategies will be helpful to you as well.

I'm a Marriage and Family Therapist and have specialized in helping couples for over two decades. I fell in love with coaching in 1997 and I ended up founding Relationship Coaching Institute because there was no relationship coach training program at the time. I fell in love with coaching as a powerful, empowering way of helping people with their life, work, and relationships that got far better results than I did as a therapist.

In my practice it was quite common to have a couple come into my office and tell me that the last therapist they worked with said that they should get a divorce, that their relationship was “unhealthy.” I was appalled whenever I heard this, and I heard it way too often. I want to tell you straight away that no helping professional of any kind, not a therapist, not a counselor, a social worker or a coach should tell a client to break up or stay in a relationship.

Whether to stay or go is absolutely, 100% your decision. It is a very
personal and intimate decision. The consequences are immense, and so our job as helping professionals is to support our clients to make this decision consciously and carefully. And that is what we're going to cover in this e-book.

I take full responsibility for what I'm going to share with you in these pages. This is my perspective and I invite you to disagree. I don't pretend to have all the answers, however, I do consider this to be a very balanced, responsible approach for singles and couples making a decision about a relationship they are struggling with. So let's get started.
Decision-making Factors

What kinds of things go into the decision of whether to stay or go in a relationship? First of all, the type of relationship: not all relationships are the same. You have dating relationships, co-habitation relationships, pre-committed relationships, pre-marital relationships and committed relationships. They're very different. The decision making process depends upon the type of relationship and we will address each one.

The Impact of Leaving

The impact of leaving, not just on you but sometimes there are kids and family involved. There is a short term impact and a long term impact, so a choice you make today, in the moment, has long term consequences. Yes, that might sound obvious to say, but when we are in the moment, we often will make the choice impulsively or reactively and we won't even consider the long term consequences, or if we do we're not even conscious about what the long term consequences are. We definitely need to take into consideration the impact of leaving.

The Choice

Is this a conscious choice or is it an impulse? Have you explored this fully? Have you taken into consideration all the factors, including your own part in it, or is this just an impulsive reactive choice because you're upset, you're angry, you're frustrated? Trust me, I've been divorced twice. I've been in other relationships besides married relationships, and when I've struggled with this choice, I have struggled with it for years. It wasn't an impulse to just leave, it was
a struggle for years, and I totally understand the impulse to want that struggle to be over, to just make a decision and move on. It is really hard to stay in a situation that is stressful or frustrating. It's really hard. I totally understand that. This is why it's important to get the support you need to be as conscious as possible, because the impulse will be, eventually, “I just want the pain to be over.”

**Requirements, Needs, and Wants**

Another factor, a very important factor, is requirements, needs, and wants. What I discovered when I got into relationship coaching is that we have different needs in a relationship, and they are not all equal. Some of them are requirements. They are absolute, must have, non-negotiable deal-breakers, and if a requirement isn't met, the relationship will not work.

Then there are needs, which you need to be happy. You need for your life to work with your partner. You need to feel loved. But they're not necessarily deal breakers. You're not going to get a divorce because of it, and they are solvable. There is a difference between solvable and unsolvable problems.

Then there are wants. Wants are the icing on the cake. Wants are what make life enjoyable. However, you can have a want unmet and still be happy. The problem with wants is that sometimes we confuse wants with needs or with requirements. That's where having a relationship coach or a neutral third party that understands this can really help to talk through what's really important to you: what is the critical non-negotiable deal breaker, and what would be okay and you could live with if it happened or didn't happen, and what's optional?
As far as requirements, what I found is that these are so huge that you really cannot live with a relationship as it is if the requirement isn't met. Let's take the example of infidelity. It's quite common that infidelity will cause a relationship to go in crisis because one partner can absolutely not stand having infidelity in the relationship. That's an example of a requirement. It is so strong. It is so forceful; you absolutely cannot live without it. Living without it is really difficult, and it would cause you to break up the relationship even if the consequences are immensely high for doing so.

When we get married we take vows, right? We take vows to be together for life. We, I would like to think, take those vows pretty seriously. So what would cause us to break those vows, to break that serious commitment that we made to be together for life? There is some huge force that is even bigger than your vow. I call that force requirements. There is more to the story. It is possible to live with a requirement not being met. Things change, for instance, infidelity. Let's say there is infidelity, you can get through it. Maybe you can't live with infidelity and that is a deal breaker, but you can work through it with your partner, and you can get past it. There are situations where requirements aren't necessarily a reason to break up a relationship, but that's part of making a conscious choice. Those are some of the decision making factors to consider.
Solvable Vs. Unsolvable Relationship Problems

Relationship issues can generally be divided into “solvable” and “unsolvable” categories.

Solvable relationship problems are generally related to your Needs. The most common relationship needs are Emotional and Functional. Your emotional needs are what you need to feel loved. Your functional needs are what you need for your life to work in a way that fits for you, as determined by your Vision. Needs are negotiable, and there are many ways to meet a need. However, the test for a need is that if it were not met, you would experience an issue EVERY time, so needs are very important, and are the difference between being happy or unhappy in a relationship.

Unsolvable relationship problems are generally related to your Requirements. Whether you know them or not, you do have non-negotiable requirements that MUST be met in order for a relationship to work for you. If ONE is missing the relationship will not work for you. Requirements are the relationship breakers, but we often confuse them with needs and wants, and treat them as equal. For example, a couple will argue about having children or not (which is probably a requirement for at least one partner), and will argue about who forgot to pay the gas bill (a functional need), and they both seem pretty stressful and interfere with the relationship working. The difference is that paying bills is negotiable and there are many ways to work that out, where having children is pretty non-negotiable for most people, who either want children or don’t, and if they are not in alignment they have an unsolvable problem.
Four Alternatives for Solving an Unsolvable Problem

Here are 4 Alternatives for Solving An Unsolvable Problem:

1. Stay in the relationship and be unhappy

   Many couples stay together and are miserable for many years. This option was more prevalent in past generations. Today, most people expect and need personal fulfillment, and find it impossible to stay in a situation that doesn’t work for them after time and effort has failed to fix the problem.

2. Leave the relationship

   This is the most common alternative chosen, and the reason for our high divorce rate.

3. Let go of the problem

   It is possible to simply let go of the problem. People do this when they realize the relationship is more important than their requirement, or if it is an area of growth. Requirements are core to who you are and the life and relationship you want, and it is pretty rare to be able to let go of one. An example of letting go of a requirement as an area of growth might be a partner who could not accept their partner’s weight gain, deciding to let go of needing them to be thin and accepting them the way they are.

4. Compromise

   When you compromise you give up some of what you need in order to meet in the middle. This can be a challenge with Requirements, which tend to be
pretty black and white. For example, how do you meet in the middle about children? You either have them, or you don’t. This option tends to work better with the support of a Relationship Coach to help the couple examine the options creatively and objectively and negotiate something that works for both partners, and is sustainable in the long run.
Types of Relationships

Dating

Next, let's talk about the types of relationships. First we have dating relationships. This is when you're single and you are getting together with another single person and you are not exclusive, but you are getting to know this person, and you might have a few dates before you decide to become exclusive. This is the stage that some people stay in for years. Other people, on the second date they're exclusive. The dating relationship is generally non-exclusive. See my Dating Red Flags Checklist in the appendix for evaluating a dating relationship.

Pre-committed

Pre-committed relationships are when you have found somebody and you've been dating and now you are exclusive. Both of you are not dating anybody else anymore. You have now decided to be an exclusive couple, but you are not yet committed. It is a form of commitment to be exclusive, but it's not a committed relationship. What's on your mind when you're in a committed relationship is, “Is this the right relationship for me? Should I make a commitment here?” It's a very good question, a very conscious question and this is a stage of relationship that I love. It's a great stage for relationship coaching to help a new couple, a pre-committed couple, become clear: Is this a good long term fit for you? Should you become committed, would that be a good choice?

See my Relationship Choice Questionnaire in the appendix for evaluating a pre-committed relationship.
Pre-marital

The pre-marital relationship is when the decision has been made: “Yes, we want to become committed. We want to get married.” They haven't actually done it yet, but the decision has been made. So the question, “is this the right relationship for me, should I make a commitment here,” has been answered, but the commitment hasn't been formally made yet.

It's still reversible and it's still important to explore compatibility, building a good foundation for your long term relationship, so that when you do become committed you have a really good start. The pre-marital stage is when you've already answered that question and you've decided to become committed, you just haven't taken the step yet. Again, sometimes couples stay in this stage for a very long time.

See my Relationship Choice Questionnaire in the appendix for evaluating a pre-marital relationship.

Committed

Then of course there are committed relationships. In today's world there are all sorts of alternative lifestyles and different kinds of relationships and we want to respect them all. But committed relationships are committed. Marriage is an obvious form of a committed relationship. It's a legally binding agreement. There are legal consequences and you have to go through a legal process to break it up. But also, you can make a commitment but not be legally married. For example gay marriage, although that's changing real quick. A commitment is quite serious and we'll explore what that looks like and what it means.
What is Commitment?

The question of when a relationship is committed is a source of much confusion and debate. We live in a time when the marriage rate is going down, the co-habitation rate is going up, and the majority of first-born children are now born to unmarried parents. Yet, when I ask an unmarried couple “Is your relationship committed?” almost always one or both will energetically answer “Yes!”

Commitment vs. Promise

I recently had a conversation with a woman who told me she had just broken off a “committed” relationship. A few questions later I learned that she had been dating this person for a year, they were not living together, and the reason she broke it off is that he “cheated.”

We talked about pre-committed vs. committed relationships, and she agreed that it was a pre-committed relationship, but insisted that they had made a “commitment” to each other.

OK, things were getting clearer. On the one hand is the status of the relationship- pre-committed vs. committed, and on the other hand are commitments made within the relationship. Two different things, right?

In our conversation, it occurred to me to make a distinction between a “Commitment” vs. a “Promise.” They made a promise to each other to be exclusive within the context of a relationship that was not committed. That distinction seemed to help her make more sense of things.
When I asked the RCI coaches for feedback on the “commitment vs. promise” distinction, most felt that it was just semantics and there is not much of a difference. The general consensus was that when you make a promise you are making a commitment.

Well, I agree that it is a question of semantics, and here is my definition of terms:

PROMISE: Verbally stated future intention to perform a specific act.
- I promise to pick up your dry cleaning and not forget this time
- I promise to be exclusive in our relationship

COMMITMENT: Both a FACT demonstrated by behavior, and an ATTITUDE consisting of thoughts and beliefs.
- I am committed to keeping my promises
- I am committed to our relationship

In short, a promise is something you say, and a commitment is something you do. A promise is situation-specific. A commitment is contextual.

A promise is a small commitment. If a potential partner doesn’t keep promises, I would question their ability to keep commitments, as they are definitely related.
Confusion About Commitment

Whether or not you agree with my semantics, the distinction I made between a commitment and a promise was helpful for the above conversation.

The larger picture though, is that I see a lot of confusion about the status of today’s relationships. Some years ago when I coined the term “pre-commitment” to describe couples that were exclusive but not yet committed, it was a helpful distinction, but the question remains- “What is commitment?”

When you are married, it is clear you are in a committed relationship. Your commitment is a legal contract and a publicly witnessed FACT. However, it is common for couples in trouble for one or both partners to have an uncommitted ATTITUDE.

I have talked with many unmarried people, as the woman above, who have described themselves in “committed relationships.” They clearly have the attitude, but often have nothing but verbal promises (and sometimes not even that!) to demonstrate that the relationship is committed.

**In My Opinion, You Are Not In A Committed Relationship If:**

1. Your partner is not aware your relationship is committed

2. You are wondering if this relationship is committed

3. You and your partner have differences of opinion about the status of your relationship

4. Your family and friends have different perceptions about the status of
your relationship

5. You and your partner have not acted to explicitly formalize your commitment in some way

6. You are relying on verbal promises without a significant track record of them being kept

A commitment is explicit and unambiguous. A commitment is a formal event of some kind between two people. A commitment is something you DO over time. A real commitment is usually legally enforceable and there are consequences for breaking it.

And, for a relationship to be truly committed, there are no exits- mentally, emotionally, or physically. When the going gets rough, you make it work.

**Continuum of Commitment**

Commitment is not a light switch that goes from “off” to “on.” When building a relationship with someone, the level of commitment gradually increases.

Then you have all the shades of gray… living together, dating exclusively for more than a year, even engaged to be married, that might look and feel like commitment, but is it really?
Fact vs. Attitude

Commitment in a relationship is complicated in that it takes two people, and it requires an alignment of FACT (events, actions) and ATTITUDE (thoughts, beliefs) for both of them.

It is common to be committed in fact (e.g. “married”) but not in attitude (e.g. “We’ve been married for ten years and have two kids, but I’m not sure this is the right relationship for me.”).

It is also common to be pre-committed in fact (e.g. dating exclusively) and committed in attitude (e.g. “This is ‘The One!’ “).

In my work with couples I have found that the most important variable determining their future success is their level of commitment to the relationship.

In my experience, when couples are committed in fact, but not in attitude, their prognosis is poor.

Defining Commitment

So, when is a relationship committed? --When there is an alignment of fact and attitude.

What creates the “fact” of commitment? I propose these three criteria:

CRITERION #1: Promises made to each other about the permanent nature of the relationship that are kept

CRITERION #2: Explicit, formal, public declaration
CRITERION #3: Unambiguous to partners and others

In today's world, if all three of the above are met, I would say it is a committed relationship, whether legally married or not.

If after the above information you’re still confused about the status of your relationship, see my Relationship Status Questionnaire in the appendix.
For Singles: Guidelines for Dating Relationships

These strategies don't apply to committed relationships, so if you're not single please skip this section.

Types of Dating

There's at least two types of dating: recreational dating, which is dating for fun, and committed dating which is the kind of dating you might do when you are seeking the love of your life. You don't want to just fool around and have fun. You don't want to be with somebody just for the short term. You are seeking a committed relationship. In my mind, those are two completely different journeys and decision making processes. The kind of people that you will choose to have fun with are not necessarily the kind of people that are good long term choices for a committed relationship with.

However, the problem is, a lot of people, when they're not conscious of this, (which is why I wrote the book, Conscious Dating) they tend to date and hang out with people they have fun with. Then that evolves into a longer term, more committed relationship and all of a sudden the person they had fun with isn't fun anymore, and it isn't a workable long term relationship. The criterion for a committed relationship is a different from the criterion for a fun relationship or a recreational relationship.
Partner Selection Tools

Your primary partner selection tools when you are dating and the Conscious Dating concepts of requirements and needs and wants. If you know what your requirements are (and you should), then you want to choose a partner that's aligned with all of them. Not some of them, not most of them, but all of them, because remember, it's so important. It's so critical: if one requirement is missing then the relationship won't work; it's doomed. You need to know what your requirements are and you need to choose a partner that meets all of them.

For more information about Conscious Dating visit www.consciousdating.com

“Screening in” versus “Screening out”

“Screening” is a Conscious Dating concept and the process of determining, “Does this person meet my requirements? Are enough of my needs met that I could make a relationship work with this person?” Hopefully you're not just going to jump into bed, and into a relationship with just anybody. You need to have some criterion. That's what the partner selection tools are for.

The process of “screening in” is when you are finding ways that a relationship could work with this person. It's like, “That didn't quite work, but I'm going to give him another chance. Maybe they had a bad day.” You are finding reasons why a relationship could work. You're screening people in. You are reluctant to reject them. You want to give them a chance. You're trying to be inclusive. You're trying to be a nice person.

“Screening out” is the opposite; you are using your partner selection tools to find a reason to say “no.” When you date or you're online looking at internet
matchmaking profiles, or when you're having coffee with somebody, you are looking for a reason to say “no.” The most immediate reasons are going to be your requirements, other reasons involve chemistry: the thing that we can't measure. It's either there or not there but we can definitely feel it.

In my dating life I have found that screening out is by far more effective and efficient than screening in.

Yes, it might be scary to say no to so many people so quickly and you might feel like you're being a perfectionist or unrealistic but the reality is if you are clear about who you are and what you want and you meet somebody and there is a very definite reason to say no, then say no. Because, I'll tell you another thing that I learned, which is in the beginning of a relationship, when you first meet somebody, often you will identify a red flag. We are almost always aware of it. It's not like it sneaks up on us or we weren't aware of it. We knew about it.

In every relationship that I've ever had that didn't work out, it broke up because of a red flag that I knew about at the very beginning. Maybe I'm weird. Maybe it's just me. Maybe that's not you. Maybe... I don't think so. It's a very common experience. So screening out is a very effective way to determine if this a good long term choice for you. To get what you really want, you need to be able to say “no” to what you don't want. You need to be available, you need to seek the love of your life, and the way to do that is, when you meet somebody that is not the love of your life and you can see that from the beginning, say “no.”
The Role of Settling

What I found is that just like screening in versus screening out, we as singles often don't want to be alone. We have dreams of what we really want for our life but part of us tells us that that's not really going to happen. That's just a dream, so we tend to settle for the best we can find or the best we think we can get. What I've learned is that when we settle for any less than what we really want, we're not going to be happy.

This is always going to weigh on us. It's always going to be part of the relationship. It doesn't go away. It's not like, "Okay, I'll accept this 80% relationship and I'm going to erase the other 20%. It's not going to be there anymore." No, that 20% that doesn't work for you is always going to be there, it's going to interfere with the relationship working. When you are single, these are critical decision making tools that you can use to find the love of your life and make that choice and decide whether to stay or whether to go. For more information please visit www.consciousdating.com.

Again, see my Dating Red Flags Checklist in the appendix for evaluating a dating relationship.
Guidelines for Pre-committed and Pre-marital Relationships

Decision-Making Tools

The decision-making tools of requirements, needs and wants definitely fit here. Another part of that is your vision, and another is your purpose. Your vision is what you want for your life. It's this inner image that you are carrying around inside you. It's your dream that you want to make real, and it's your path that you are following to make that real. You want to be with a partner that supports that and can be part of that. When you are in a relationship and everything seems to line up, make sure your vision lines up as well.

Another aspect is purpose. Your purpose is your reason for living. It's your reason for being on this planet. It's what gives your life meaning. Your purpose might be to serve God, or your purpose might be to have children and raise them, and have a family and be a mom or a dad. Those are completely valid purposes, and you need to choose a partner, be with a partner, that supports your purpose, that allows you to pursue your life purpose. Those are some examples of decision-making tools, the same kind of decision-making tools that you would use when you are single and dating and choosing a partner, choosing someone to hang out with, you would continue to use those tools in your decision making: “Is this the right relationship for me?”

The decision, before you are committed of should I stay, should I go, my bias, (and this is just me, you might disagree) is if it's not a good long-term fit, if it's not going to support your vision, your purpose, your requirements, needs
and wants, then say no. Walk away. The relationship, although you are attached, although you might even be in love, the relationship is very real and breaking up is hard to do, but avoiding the pain of breaking up is not a reason to continue a relationship that is going to end up doomed anyway. It's harder to break it up later when you’re committed. It's far easier to break it up earlier.

As a relationship coach, I've had the privilege of working with many pre-committed and pre-marital couples. Sometimes they are clear that this is the right relationship: yes, let's become committed. Let's get married and let's live happily ever after! And that is wonderful when you can do so with such clarity and confidence. On the other hand, I've worked with couples and they come to the decision, not because I told them to, but because I led them through the decision-making process, “You know what, this is not a good long term choice. I love you. I'm in love with you. I really want this relationship to work, but I can see that it's not going to work, and that is heartrending. I'm really sad about that, but to honor you, and who you are, what you really want, and for me to get what I really want out of my life, we have to break up.”

As a relationship coach, it is such an honor to be part of that process and to help them get closure and to help them say goodbye in a very honoring, positive way. Because to get what you really want you must say no to what you don't want. This is very different with committed relationships as you will soon discover, but right now we're not talking about committed relationships. We're talking about pre-committed and pre-marital relationships.
Evolve vs. Push vs. Twist

When you allow a relationship to be what it is, to evolve as it is, normally and naturally, then you get to make a conscious decision based on what is. I am guilty of pushing a relationship, of wanting to be further than it is, of wanting to make it work. I have personally experienced that that's dangerous. It doesn't work very well when you push a relationship.

Twisting is trying to twist the relationship into something that it's not. For example, I recall a couple who came into my office as a marriage and family therapist and they appeared to be in love. They appeared to really want their relationship to work. It turns out that they were both having an affair... with each other! They were both married to other people and they fell in love and they came to me as a couples therapist. They wanted to live happily ever after together but they were both married and they both had families. I couldn't change that. I had no magic wand.

They were trying to twist their situation in the relationship into something that it wasn't. You're not available for each other. Yeah, you could both get divorced and be together, but you've got to make that choice, and it's going to be hard, and it's going to be devastating to both you and your families and your kids. We have this tendency though, we have a dream and our vision, which is normal and natural to have, and then there is reality, and it's tempting to try to twist reality into being what we want it to be. Just watch yourself, or watch when you have a client or a friend that's doing that, because we do it. It's very tempting.
Dangers of Settling

Again the dangers of settling, we already talked a bit about settling and pre-committed and pre-marital relationships. You are attached. You are in love. You really want this relationship to work. The cost of breaking up seems high, including the emotional cost. Breaking up is hard to do, but trust me it is far easier to do before a commitment. If the relationship is not a good fit, well...

Let's talk about fit for a second. In terms of not settling, fit is 100%. Most people when I tell them that will tell me, “You can't expect that, that's not realistic.” Well, yes, it is.

Let's say you go to a department store and you're looking for a jacket. There are a lot of jackets in that department store you try on a lot of them, and a lot of them don't fit. Chances are, if you keep on looking you'll find one that does. The cost of choosing one that doesn't fit is you're never quite going to be comfortable with it. It's never quite going to look good on you. You're always going to regret buying it. As long as you're going to make a choice, make choice to go after what you really want, 100% of what you really want. It is possible. I know, because after a lifetime of settling I finally got 100% of what I really want.

I do not recommend multiple divorces in order to get there. However, if you are conscious, if you are in a position to make that choice, go after 100% of what you really want. It is possible. The minute you tell yourself it's not possible, that is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Of course it's not going to be possible.

Part of what we do as relationship coaches, one of the very important roles we have for singles and pre-committed couples is to support them to
identify what is 100% of what they really want and help them identify the choices that would line up with that. It's not up to us to tell them that's good, that's bad, that's right, that's wrong, that's a good choice, that will get you 100%, that won't. That's not up to us. The client knows, so we're just asking them the question. We're helping them achieve clarity, and clarity has a lot of power, a lot of power.

When you think about it, a lot of the confusion and opaqueness of life, should I, shouldn't I, maybe this, maybe that; that's really hard. Clarity is like clear as day, of course, THIS is the best choice! This is the right choice. This is how I get what I want. As coaches, that's what we do with our clients: we help them achieve that clarity, and then the choice becomes obvious. We don't have to tell them what it is. They know what it is, right in front of them. This is part of the art and science of coaching. The danger of settling is it's so tempting and we have all these voices in our head that tell us that what we really want isn't possible, 100% isn't possible. We don't deserve it. It's not going to happen. You have to take this or be alone. That is fear. That is all fear, “false expectations appearing real.” It is not real. However, it is what drives a lot of relationship choices.

Again, see my Relationship Choice Questionnaire in the appendix for evaluating a pre-committed or pre-marital relationship.

For more information about pre-committed relationships and pre-marital relationships visit [www.coupleforlife.com](http://www.coupleforlife.com)
Commitment – The Path to Relationship Happiness

Let's talk about committed relationships. They're a very different animal from dating relationships, very different from pre-marital or pre-committed relationships. It's a totally different conversation. Just as Stephen Stills sung in his now famous song, the answer to “should you stay or should you go” probably is “love the one you're with.” I'm going to explain exactly why. However, I will cover very clear guidelines for when you should break a committed relationship up. It's not that I'm saying you should never ever, ever break a committed relationship up, but the commitment to making a committed relationship work is so important that you break it up as a last resort.

This is very different from screening out, which finding a reason to say “no” to a dating relationship and break it off as soon as possible so that you can go on to find what you really want. If you're in a committed relationship, breaking that commitment is a last resort. Let's talk about why. First of all, do you know what the benefits of a committed relationship are? We seem to be driven to make commitments. Most people tend to seek a committed relationship, not hang out in a relationship kind of laissez faire forever. Most people want commitment. We have a drive towards commitment. Why? What are the benefits of committed relationships?
Seven Benefits of Committed Relationships

First, this is my favorite one, regular, safe, good sex. Committed monogamous partners have more and better sex than singles and non-committed partners.

Second, companionship. We're social beings, we're comforted by closeness. Married people are healthier, happier and live longer than singles.

Third, intimacy. Emotional closeness and love and trust and mutual support, it builds and improves over time in a committed relationship. It's much more difficult to achieve in quality and quantity outside of a committed relationship. Sure, you can be friends. You can support each other. You can even experience intimacy, but there is something about a committed relationship in which you can really build that and evolve that over time far beyond what you can in a non-committed relationship.

Fourth, family. Both children and adults seem to thrive in an environment that's stable, long term, multi-generational relationships.

Fifth, economics. Committed couples are financially more successful than singles and non-committed couples. Given that economics is how you survive, it's how you pay your bills, it's how you eat and shelter and provide security for your future and your family, it's no small thing.

Six, community. Extended family and neighbors, and churches, and other forms of networks of supportive relationships thrive on the stability of committed relationships.
Seven, mental, emotional, physical health. The research shows that married adults live longer and have fewer mental, emotional problems when they are in committed relationships. That’s just a fact.

**Research Results on Happiness and Divorce**

Let’s talk about some research results on happiness and divorce. First, two thirds of unhappily married spouses who stay married reported their marriages were happy five years later. This is a study that I read about in the book, *The Case for Marriage* by Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher. This one fact, this one research finding blew me away. I wish I knew this when I was a marriage and family therapist, because if I were able to give my couples hope, “you know what, stick it out and the odds are two out of three that in five years you'll be happy...” That's what this research result means: that two thirds of unhappily married spouses who stayed married reported their marriage was happy five years later.

The most unhappy marriages reported the most dramatic results. Among those who rated their marriages very, very unhappy, almost eight out of ten who avoided divorce were happily married five years later. In their book Waite and Gallagher call this the “marital endurance ethic.” What a great name, marital endurance ethic: you stick it out and things change. Things will get better. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. There is a rainbow at the end of the rain. When you are in a relationship and you are stressed. You are frustrated. You are in despair, remember, things change. Things will not be like this forever. That's important information.
Next, unhappily married adults who divorced were no happier than unhappily married adults who stayed married. Okay, if this is true and research shows that, if you divorce, you're not going to be any happier than if you stayed married, well, you might as well stay married. The consequences are a lot less. The cost is a lot less and there is a two thirds chance that if you stick it out five years, then you'll be happy later.

Next, unhappy spouses who had divorced and remarried were no happier on average than those who stayed married. When we divorce we expect that we're going to be happier. We're unhappy, we divorce, we expect and we want to be happier, and the research is showing that is just not true. That doesn't happen.

Next, many happily married spouses have extended periods of marital unhappiness, often for serious reasons like alcoholism, infidelity, verbal abuse, emotional neglect, depression, illness and work reversal, meaning unemployment. Yes, when you're married, when you're in a committed relationship, times get tough. Times can even be very, very tough. Times can even be awful for an extended time. Even happily married couples go through awful periods and they get through it together.

Next, unhappily married adults who divorced were no more likely to report emotional and psychological improvements than those who stayed married. You would think that if you get divorced from an unhappy marriage that you would become a happier person, a healthier person. You would grow and evolve as a person. The research shows that that is not correct. This is research. These are statistics about what happens with most people. There are lots and
lots of exceptions. I don't want you to get the impression that I'm dogmatically saying don't get divorced ever. That's not what I'm saying at all. Right now, I just want to share with you some important research results that I came across.

Next, to avoid divorce many assume marriages must become happier. But to get happier, unhappy couples must first avoid divorce. This is really interesting because I can't tell you how many times, as a marriage and family therapist, I've worked with a couple where one partner was very, very unhappy and they would not participate in making the relationship work unless the other partner changed. It's like the message is, “when you change, and I'm happy with that, then I'll change, then I'll participate.” It's totally unrealistic. It's really tough to work with those kinds of couples. To avoid divorce, many assume marriages must become happier but to get happier, unhappy couples must first avoid divorce. This is simple but profound.

In most cases, the strong commitment to stay married not only helps couples avoid divorce, it helps more couples achieve a happier marriage; commitment by itself. Remember the marital endurance ethic: commitment is like the glue. When you are committed to your relationship and your marriage and your life together, you find a way to make it work. Commitment means not having any exits. Exits include a mental exit, dreaming what it would be like without this partner, or a physical exit like having an affair.
When Should You Break Up a Committed Relationship?

Now let’s talk about when you should break a commitment. I want to provide you nine very, very clear guidelines that you can use to decide if and when you should break a commitment in a relationship. In other words, if you’re married: if you should get divorced.

First, since unhappiness is usually related to unmet requirements and needs, can you find ways to get them met outside your relationship while honoring your commitment? Are your requirements and needs realistic? Is it realistic to expect that this one partner, this one relationship can meet them all? Can you find ways to get them met outside of the relationship, in ways that support the relationship and support you?

For example, let’s say one of your requirements is to have a family, to have babies, to have children, and your partner absolutely refuses or they agreed when you got married and then later on they refuse. I’ve encountered that. Okay, can you find a way to have children in your life, have family in your life, without actually having babies? The idea here is that happiness often is really an inside job and often we create the unhappiness for ourselves because we are expecting our partner to make us happy, and the marriage to make us happy. Happiness really needs to start from inside us. When it’s related to an unmet requirement or need, can you find ways to get them met, without needing your partner to be the one to make it happen?

Second, are the children better off in or out of the situation? There is a famous question that Dear Abby always used when addressing this question, are
you better off with him or without him? Are the children better off with you or without you? Often, in an unhappy relationship the children are fine. The children are better off with you together. It's quite common where there is an unhappy relationship and really bleeds over into the children and it's a terrible environment for them. But take a look at that. It's important for the children. In fact, I've seen a lot of couples stay together for the children. They're miserable together yet they stay together for the children, and the children benefit from it. Then the children go off to college, and they become adults, and then these empty-nesters who were miserable together, all of a sudden ... they've been together for 20 years. Now they start having more fun together, they start reconnecting, and they're happy. That's quite possible.

Remember, things do change. There is no such thing as a relationship emergency. Even if you're unhappy, even if you're feeling in despair, like right now, tomorrow is another day. There is no such thing as a relationship emergency. It would be better for the children, I have seen lots of couples stay together for the children. It is not necessarily a bad thing. It can be a very good thing. So that's another consideration.

Third, what is the position of your family and friends? I found that it is uncanny how they knew all along what we discover much later. Do a little research and find out how other people perceive your relationship. Oftentimes, they might give you feedback like, “You know what, she is the best thing that ever happened to you, don't let her go.” Or, “He is just sucking you dry. I saw that from the beginning. You are not good together.” It doesn't mean that you should actually take their advice, but it does mean that looking at your situation
through other people's eyes can provide very important information.

Fourth, are you really taking full responsibility? You need to take responsibility for yourself, your life, your happiness, your choices, your thoughts, your feelings, your wants and your needs. If you are resentful, if you're blaming your partner in any way, then you're not taking full responsibility. You're giving your power away. You're being reactive to what your partner says and does. As adults, we should take full, personal responsibility for our lives. Even if you're unhappy, and it's a relationship and this other person is participating in your unhappiness, you should be able to clearly identify your contributions and how you are making yourself unhappy in the situation. Take full responsibility. Learn how to do that.

It's something very important to look at. It's an important reason to work with a therapist, counselor, or coach, because this is a developmental issue: if you are not able to, if you haven't learned yet how to take personal responsibility, none of your relationships are going to work. Your life is not going to work. You are not going to be happy no matter what, because the whole world is going have to bend over and give you everything you want in order for you to be happy, and it does not work like that. You do need to take full responsibility. Are you really taking full responsibility? Very important to look at.

Number five, what about your commitment? If you know the odds are two out of three that it will work out if you stick it out long enough, can you hang in there? Can you take responsibility? Can you focus on your attitude and what you are doing? Great quote here, “life is not what happens to us. Life is what we do with what happens to us.” So what about your commitment? You made a
commitment. Are you going to honor that commitment? Are you going to do everything you can to honor that commitment?

Six, are you getting the support you need? Are you really using that support? I can't tell you how many times I've seen people struggle with their relationships and they're doing it all by themselves. Get support, friends, family, neighbors, ministers, church community, counselors, therapists, a coach; don't do this alone. Get support. Put yourself in the hands of somebody that you trust, somebody that seems wise and objective, not somebody that agrees with everything that you say, not somebody that makes you feel good about yourself.

In fact, it's better to trust somebody that challenges you a bit, because they see the areas of growth that you have. They see the blind spots that you have. Don't just be with friends or people that make you feel good, and they agree with everything you say. Find wise and understanding friends and mentors that you can both relate to. You can do this as a couple. Get the support that you need. Do not do this alone. You shouldn't even consider breaking up a commitment if you haven't gone through the journey of getting support for your relationship, because no one is successful alone. I'm a relationship coach, I'm a therapist, of course, but I really, really do believe that.

And as mentioned before, steer clear of anyone ("professional," friend, or family member) who believes they know what you should do. You need support to go through the process to make your own decision.

Seven, are you and the children physically and emotionally safe? Commitment is not a reason to stay in an abusive or unsafe situation. Sticking it
out in a committed relationship and two thirds odds the relationship will be happy five years later does not apply to abuse at all. However, I will say that sometimes we call things abuse that are simply people acting out stressfully in the relationship. Raising their voice, name calling, things like that. We have to take a look at what is abuse versus what is just frustrated acting-out that's within normal range. That's another reason to get the support that you need. Get some outside objective opinions about that.

Number eight, what is your true underlying commitment? If you would leave because you are unhappy, your commitment is to your own happiness, not to the relationship. Be honest with yourself about the difference between your commitment and your attitude, what you’re saying and what you're doing. If a committed relationship works because of commitment, commitment to what? Commitment to the relationship, not commitment to your happiness. In fact, what I found, and this is from the Radical Marriage material that my wife and I are developing (you can check that out at www.radicalmarriage.com), a happy fulfilled relationship is more likely to happen if both partners are committed to each other's happiness. I am committed to my wife’s happiness 100%. She is committed to my happiness 100%. What a great deal. I work to make her happy. She works to make me happy. That's a partnership. This is what I want for all couples. What is your true underlying commitment? If it's to your own happiness, what about your partner's happiness?

Don't be like those couples that were in my office saying, “he's got to change first. I'll be different when I'm happy.” That doesn't work. So be honest with yourself about where your commitment is: is it to the relationship or is it to
your own happiness? If it's to your own happiness, I'm here to tell you that not only is this relationship not going to work, all other relationships are not going to work because you're being, honestly, selfish. Commitment to the relationship is what makes relationships work. That's the foundation.

Nine, have you really tried everything? I can't tell you how many couples I've worked with where one of the first things they said to me when they started working with me was, “we've tried everything.” You know they haven't. You know that, most of the time, they've done the same thing over and over expecting different results, and you know what that is: that's the definition of insanity. But maybe they believe that. Maybe they believe it because “you don't know what you don't know.” They don't know that there are things they haven't tried. They really believe they tried everything. They've tried everything they know.

What about the things you don't know? I have found that in life and in business, there are always solutions, and most of them you are not aware of right now. If you're conscious of this then you know that “There are ideas and strategies that I don't even know yet.” What you can do is search for them. You can explore. You can be open to them. You can brainstorm. Seek and ye shall find. This is really cool because you don't have to have the answer, you simply stay in the question. Instead of, “why is this relationship not working,” ask “how can I make this relationship work?”

You might think, “I don't know. I've tried everything,” but stay in that question, “how can I make this relationship work?” I don't know, but I'm going to read books. I'm going to talk to counselors and therapists. I'm going to go to workshops. I'm going to explore and answers are going to come. Because you are
open. Staying in the question means that you are open to the solutions. This is a
very cool approach to life, and to business, and to relationships.

You don't need to know all the answers. You don't need to have the
solution right now. All you have to do is stay in the question. When you feel like
you've tried everything, trust me, you haven't. Or, trust Thomas Edison who says,
“when you've exhausted all possibilities, remember this, you haven't.” So, those
are my nine things to try when considering breaking up a committed
relationship.
Resources

So, at this point that's everything I got. That's my best take on how to address “should I stay or should I go?” I've done my best to provide you clear information and guidelines for if you're single, or pre-committed or pre-marital couple or a committed couple. What you need to know and the tools or strategies that you can use to help you make that decision, “should I stay or should I go?”

I have some resources for you, **www.consciousdating.com** for singles, **www.coupleforlife.com** for couples, **www.radicalmarriage.com** for radical relationships, and if you'd like to become a relationship coach or explore that, if you care about relationships, you have a passion for relationships, you really want to help others with relationships, and you really see that relationship coaching is the way to go as opposed to being a therapist or something else, then please do visit **www.relationshipcoachinginstitute.com** and check out our Relationship Coach Starter Kit. It's free.
“What if your spouse is not committed to your happiness but you are committed to theirs?”

That's a great start. Definitely keep your commitment to their happiness and stay in the conversation. See a counselor, therapist or coach. Go to www.radicalmarriage.com and look at the videos together, especially radical intimacy. We want to love and be loved in a relationship. That's why we're here, that's important to us.

It's not just about having dinner together, or paying the bills together, or convenience, or even sex. It's about intimacy. There is a program that my wife, Darlene, and I did on radical intimacy that I'm really proud of. Even your husband, who doesn't seem to be committed to your happiness, I guarantee you that if you watch this video, you talk about the strategies, and you practice the strategies-- that will shift.

It's a journey. There are steps to go through. There's learning to go through. Sometimes, to change an attitude, you need to look in the mirror, identify the attitude and choose a different attitude. Sometimes, to change an attitude, you need new information. Sometimes, to change an attitude, you need inspiration, or an example, or a role model. And sometimes, to change an attitude, you just need a strategy. You need something different to do, and then when you do it, your reality will really be different, and your reality will have changed. With guys, that often works very, very well. Don't try to change their mind. Don't try to change their feelings, but focus on strategies and doing stuff...
differently, and you'll be amazed at how their attitudes and feelings will change.

So please do check out www.radicalmarriage.com, especially the radical intimacy video and all the strategies in the video, which is free. No charge.

“Even if you've chosen wrong and settled for someone, if you're married then you should just love the one you're with?”

Well, yes, kind of. What I'm saying is, use those nine strategies, do everything you can because chances are you made this choice and you made this commitment for a reason. If nothing else, there is learning to be gotten out of it.

Un-choosing the relationship and getting into another relationship isn't necessarily going to change anything unless you do everything you can in this committed relationship. It's a karma thing. There is something going on here where if you just jump from an unhappy relationship into another relationship, what I found is it's not going to make you any happier, and the research results that I shared with you bear that out. In my mind, if you are in a committed relationship, for instance, if you are married, you should do everything you can and give it all the time in the world that it needs.

When I got divorced, I didn't get divorced because I was unhappy. I ended up getting divorced after, well, my first marriage was ten years. My second marriage was eight years, but we were together for 10-11 years. I struggled with the choice, we struggled with the situation for years before making the decision. So it's not something to take lightly. It is a last resort. I'm not saying don't do it, I'm saying go through the journey. Do everything you can. Try the strategies that I shared here. Take into consideration the guidelines that I shared about “should I
stay or should I go,” and get a divorce or break up if you are in a committed relationship as a last resort, after you truly have tried everything.

Because then, whatever language you want to put to it, your karma will be clean, and you will have done the work to work through whatever relationship issues have caused you choose that relationship, and that will help you choose better the next time. It will help you have a better relationship the next time, and that's really the goal. I didn't want to get divorced. I really, really, really did not. However, I look back on it and I see that it was a necessary journey that I had to take to be where I am, to be with the love of my life, to really live happily ever after. Now, that's my journey, and I wouldn't wish that on anybody, but we all have our own journey.

The answer often depends upon religious beliefs. Abuse and addictions seem to impact most decisions. But you know what? The research shows that abuse and addiction is actually a small minority of divorce situations, a small minority. Yes, it happens. In fact, my second marriage broke up because of addiction, but it's a minority. Most people get a divorce when they could have made it work.

They just cut it off too early because “they tried everything” and they are just miserable, and they didn't want to be miserable anymore, and you know what? We can't blame them. It's a very individual, very personal choice, and if you want to make that choice as consciously and as best as possible then I have done what I can to give you those guidelines and suggestions today.
“Do you have tools to assist couples that are divorcing but still residing in the same residence?”

Yes, it’s called relationship coaching. It’s absolutely possible to divorce, be divorced, go through divorce, and live in the same residence. However, it’s very hard to do that on your own. You need support. You need guidance. You need structure, so please do get the support you need. I really do believe that we can accomplish pretty much anything with enough support.

You can climb to the top of the Empire State building with the right team on your side. You can fly to the moon with the right support. Almost anything is possible with the right support, and if it’s not happening then get the support you need. So that’s my best answer: yes, residing in the same residence when you are divorcing or divorced is absolutely possible, but get the support you need.

“I just broke my engagement with my fiancé five weeks ago. I have been second guessing myself since then.”

I sincerely hope that this information has helped you stop second guessing and be more confident in your decision. This is what I wanted when I was struggling with this situation: “should should I stay or should I go?”

I’ve probably spent half my adult life struggling with this question. Having clarity or confidence in the decision is something that I had longed for. And now, 56 years old, head of a relationship coaching organization, thousands of coaches trained all over the world, I have studied and explored relationships up and down and sideways, and I can finally share with you what I have come to understand in order to be confident and clear in this challenging situation.
My wife has let go of her physical appearance.

Here is one partner who is with another partner who has let go of her physical appearance. They have children, they are married and he wants sex. He wants a physical connection but the partner is not interested in a physical connection. She has let herself go, physically. He can't imagine spending the rest of his life without having physical intimacy, but does not want to leave their children or break up the family.

This is a wonderful, wonderful example where it can seem impossible, but you know what? It's not impossible. However, you do not have the answer right here, right now.

I would recommend that you and your partner take a look at the radical intimacy video at [www.radicalmarriage.com](http://www.radicalmarriage.com) and then graduate to the radical sex video. And also get the support you need. But what I found is that in sexless marriages, and that is essentially what this person has (and there are a lot of reasons for sexless marriages), it doesn't have to be that way, but you definitely need both partners becoming a team. When you stop blaming, and clearly this partner is blaming her for letting herself go and not being interested in sex, when you stop blaming and you become a team: “we are married. We have a relationship. We live with each other. We have a family. What can we do to make this work? What can we do to live happily ever after? What do you need? How can I make you happy? Here is what I need. I would to talk with you about what I need. Are you willing to listen to me and work with me and meet me half way?” Those kind of conversations will help change the situation. And getting the support you need. Don't do it alone.
“From now on my aim will not be to search for someone to please me but to please the one I have chosen.”


Thank you. Thank you very much. That's a great quote. It does reinforce my learning, my principle that to have fulfilling, committed relationship, we need to be committed to each other's happiness.
Closing Notes

I thank you very much for sharing this time with me. Sharing this information has been a very important thing to me, that I have wanted to do, I needed to do, that I should have done a long time ago, and I hope that this has been helpful to you for your own life, for people that you care about, and I hope you will share this information if you are a counselor, a therapist, a coach. I hope this will be helpful for you in working with your clients in your practice.

Thank you very much and if you are interested in more information please do check out www.consciousdating.com for singles, www.coupleforlife.com for couples. If you want to become a relationship coach, check us out at www.relationshipcoachinginsitute.com.

Thanks for joining us and bye for now.
Appendix

Benefits of Committed Relationships

We have a powerful need and desire for coupling that drives us into and out of relationships. The desire for partnership is pervasive and universal, reaching back to the origin of our species, spanning almost every culture and civilization.

Eighty-five percent of us marry at least once. In a recent survey, 94% of young adults stated that finding a "soul mate" was one of their highest goals. The vast majority of us want partnership and are driven into and out of relationships seeking- what? Love? Happiness? Security? Healing? All of the above?

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs might give us a clue to what we want in relationships. Once our physical needs are met (food, shelter, sex) we pursue our higher order needs, such as emotional needs for love and pleasure, and our spiritual needs such as meaning and purpose. As a society we have secured our physical needs, and are evolving to prioritize our emotional and spiritual needs.

In spite of the high failure rate of marriage and the availability of other options, why are we still driven to pair up in monogamous, committed relationships? There are many benefits to a committed relationship beyond survival of the species:
1. REGULAR, SAFE, GOOD SEX: Committed, monogamous partners have more, and better sex than singles and non-committed partners.

2. COMPANIONSHIP: We are social beings and are comforted by closeness. Married people are healthier, happier, and live longer than singles.

3. INTIMACY: Emotional closeness, love, trust, mutual support, builds and improves over time in a committed relationship, and is much more difficult to achieve in quality and quantity outside of a committed relationship.

4. FAMILY: Both children and adults thrive in an environment of stable, long-term, multi-generational relationships.

5. ECONOMICS: Committed couples are financially more successful than singles and non-committed partners.

6. COMMUNITY: Extended family, neighbors, churches, and other forms of networks of supportive relationships thrive on the stability of committed relationships.

7. MENTAL/EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL HEALTH: Married adults live longer and have fewer mental/emotional problems.
Commitment: The Path to Relationship Happiness?
by David Steele

I recently realized that in more than 20 years as a counselor, therapist, and coach, I have never been able to help anyone who wasn’t committed to what they wanted.

Having a strong rescuer/hero complex, for many years I tried for a 100% success rate helping couples save their marriages, individuals find happiness, business owners achieve success, and so on, taking personal responsibility for the outcome. Whenever the desired results didn’t happen, I blamed my skills and methods and sought more training and techniques, and never achieved more than a 50% success rate. I felt relieved when I discovered that other helping professionals did no better.

Thinking of all the people I tried to help, the biggest difference between those that succeeded and those that didn’t, appeared to be commitment.

“Commitment Coaching?”

Discovering the pivotal role of commitment, I now seek to address level of commitment first and foremost with my clients, going so far as to say that I can’t help them unless they are committed. So far, I have not had any luck helping people become more committed than they are. I’ll let you know if I figure out the secrets of “Commitment Coaching.” Until then, I will assume their level of commitment determines their outcome.

We seem to live in a society that values immediate gratification and happiness, and devalues commitment and sacrifice. Cohabiting couples want to
be happy first, then they’ll commit. No wonder the failure rate of cohabiting couples is much higher than committed couples, as well as couples that cohabit prior to marriage.

What is Commitment?

Commitment is both a FACT demonstrated by behavior, and an ATTITUDE consisting of thoughts and beliefs. Saying vows and exchanging rings in front of witnesses establishes the fact of commitment, as does the behavior of staying in an unhappy relationship no matter what. A committed attitude involves thoughts and beliefs to stay in the relationship under all circumstances.

What people say and do is typically preceded by their attitude, but not always. It is common to have a difference between fact and attitude, for example, the married person who wonders “Is this relationship right for me? Do I want to stay?” As long as they stay in the relationship, they are committed in fact, if not attitude. Behavioral choices can be interpreted to reflect the true, underlying commitment, regardless of what people say.

While both are important, if there is a difference, it is probably more effective to focus on what someone does more than their attitude and what they say. You can change actions and behavior much more easily than beliefs and thoughts, and “acting as-if” is a well-established technique for changing attitudes.

In my view, making a commitment to a relationship is a serious and irreversible choice, not to be taken lightly or entered into quickly, because you can never go back to the way your life was before. When you are single and
dating is your opportunity to explore possibilities. When you enter a pre-committed relationship is your chance to fully compare your requirements with the reality. Ideally, you make a commitment with full consciousness and clarity that this is what you want, accepting all challenges and obstacles as part of the package.

Path to Happiness Paved With Commitment?

I have found compelling evidence that the path to long-term relationship happiness requires commitment in the results of a study by Linda Waite, author of “The Case for Marriage,” who found that two-thirds of unhappily married spouses who stayed married reported that their marriages were happy five years later. She coined the term “Marital Endurance Ethic;” stating that “marriages got happier not because partners resolved problems, but because they stubbornly outlasted them.”

This is astounding. All by itself, the act of commitment appears to be more effective than counseling, therapy, workshops, self-help books, and even relationship coaching, in overcoming problems and creating a happy long-term relationship.

Attitude, Behavior, and Responsibility

Couples come to counseling and coaching wanting to be happy together. Chances are, they’ll be happy if they just stick it out long enough, they don’t need me for that. If they wish to pro-actively co-create their happiness together, as I mentioned at the beginning of this article, I’ve discovered they both must be committed and be willing to accept personal responsibility.
In working with couples I now inform them of this, and seek to immediately learn their level of commitment, their ability to accept responsibility, their attitudes toward commitment, and whether there is a difference between fact and attitude. If the “fact” is that they are in a committed relationship (e.g. married), yet their “attitude” is less than committed (e.g. “I’m not sure this is the right relationship for me” or “It’s his/her fault, I’ll change when s/he changes.”), that is where the work must begin.

It is understandable that their unhappiness might cause couples to question their relationship, however, I share with them that I have learned that the path to happiness starts with commitment and personal responsibility. I explain that if they need results before commitment then we can’t work together, as I would be doing them a disservice by wasting their time and mine, and chances are that if they do nothing other than stick it out, they’ll end up happy.

Commitment is a fact simply demonstrated by the act of staying in a relationship. While “attitude precedes outcome” is true, it is also true that “all behavior is purposeful,” meaning that what someone does is a better measure of the future than what they say. We can clear up a lot of confusion and “what ifs” ("What if there is an affair?" "What if they won’t go to counseling?" "What if my needs aren’t met?") by focusing on the “fact” of commitment as demonstrated by both partners staying in the relationship no matter what, since now, thanks to Linda Waite’s research, we know that if they do so, the odds are that it will work out.
Should Commitment Be Unbreakable?

When entering a committed relationship, the great majority of us do so with the full intention of being together for life. Ideally, breaking that commitment shouldn’t be easy or quick. In my opinion, unhappiness is not a valid reason to break a commitment; it is simply an indication that there is work to be done.

If, most of the time but not all the time, commitment is the path to relationship happiness, how do we decide whether to stick it out or not? How do we know that our misery will eventually lead to happiness or not? We can’t really know.

Since we can’t really know the prognosis of an unhappy relationship, perhaps the following questions might help:

1. Since unhappiness is usually related to unmet requirements and needs, can you find ways to get them met outside of the relationship while honoring your commitment? Sometimes we unrealistically expect our relationship to be everything we need, when happiness is really an “inside job.”

2. Are the children better off in or out of the situation? Often, while you might be unhappy, your children are better off with you together.

3. What is the position of your family and friends? It is uncanny how they knew all along what we discover much later.

4. Are you REALLY taking full responsibility? You are not if you are resentful or blaming your partner in any way. Are you giving your power away by being reactive to what your partner says and does? What about YOUR commitment? If
you know that the odds are that it will work out if you stick it out long enough, can you hang in there and take personal responsibility for your outcomes? Can you focus on YOUR attitude and what YOU can and are doing?

*Life is not what happens to us. Life is what we DO with what happens to us.*

5. Are you getting the support you need? Are you really using that support? Find a therapist, counselor, relationship coach, minister, etc, that you both trust and put yourself in their hands. Find wise and understanding friends and mentor couples that you both can relate to.

6. Are you and the children physically and emotionally safe? Commitment is not a reason to stay in an abusive and/or unsafe situation, but this is surprisingly rare (see statistics below).

7. What is your true, underlying commitment? If you would leave because you’re unhappy, your commitment is to your own happiness, not the relationship. Be honest with yourself about any differences between your commitment and your attitude, what you are saying and what you are doing.
Research Results on Commitment and Happiness

Excerpted from: “Does Divorce Make People Happy? Findings from a Study of Unhappy Marriages” By Linda J. Waite, Don Browning, William J. Doherty, Maggie Gallagher, Ye Luo, and Scott M. Stanley:

1. Two-thirds of unhappily married spouses who stayed married reported that their marriages were happy five years later. In addition, the most unhappy marriages reported the most dramatic turnarounds: among those who rated their marriages as very unhappy, almost eight out of 10 who avoided divorce were happily married five years later

2. Unhappily married adults who divorced were no happier than unhappily married adults who stayed married

3. Unhappy spouses who had divorced and remarried were no happier on average than those who stayed married

4. Many happily married spouses have extended periods of marital unhappiness, often for quite serious reasons, including alcoholism, infidelity, verbal abuse, emotional neglect, depression, illness, and work reversals

5. Unhappily married adults who divorced were no more likely to report emotional and psychological improvements than those who stayed married.

6. Unhappy marriages are less common than unhappy spouses; three out of four unhappily married adults are married to someone who is happy with the
7. Staying married did not typically trap unhappy spouses in violent relationships. Eighty-six percent of unhappily married adults reported no violence in their relationship (including 77 percent of unhappy spouses who later divorced or separated). Ninety-three percent of unhappy spouses who avoided divorce reported no violence in their marriage five years later.

8. “A strong commitment to marriage as an institution, and a powerful reluctance to divorce, do not merely keep unhappily married people locked in misery together. They also help couples form happier bonds. To avoid divorce, many assume, marriages must become happier. But it is at least equally true that in order to get happier, unhappy couples or spouses must first avoid divorce. In most cases, a strong commitment to staying married not only helps couples avoid divorce, it helps more couples achieve a happier marriage."

9. In “The Case for Marriage” Waite reports that committed couples are physically healthier, mentally and emotionally happier, have more and better sex, and are more financially successful than singles or cohabiting couples.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education (CMFCE)

http://www.smartmarriages.com

“The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and
"Better Off Financially" by Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0767906322/buildingyouri-20

Does Divorce Make People Happy? Findings from a Study of Unhappy Marriages

http://www.smartmarriages.com/does.divorce.html

Top 10 Myths of Marriage

http://listarchives.his.com/smartmarriages/smartmarriages.0202/msg00027.html

The Top 10 Myths of Divorce

http://listarchives.his.com/smartmarriages/smartmarriages.0110/msg00002.html

The Good In a Bad Marriage - Studies Say Many Can Be Salvaged

http://listarchives.his.com/smartmarriages/smartmarriages.0106/msg00029.html
Dating Red Flags Checklist

Use this checklist to identify possible red flags in a prospective relationship.

Please skip if you are married or in a committed relationship.

I. Projecting the Future:

1. _____ Would I want to spend the rest of my life with this person exactly as they are?

2. _____ Would I want this person to raise my child?

3. _____ Would I want my child to be exactly like this person?

II. Are You Talking Yourself Into a Relationship?

4. _____ Do I want to rescue or “help” them because I see their potential?

5. _____ I love the way they look or their status and it builds my self-esteem to be with them.

6. _____ We have some things in common and so I’m avoiding looking at glaring differences.

7. _____ They appear to be totally different than people I’ve been with in the past.

8. _____ I’m focusing on one important quality (money, sex, fun, humor, etc) and ignoring unmet requirements.
III. Danger Signs

9. _____ Reacts to frustration with anger, rage, blame

10. _____ Blames others or circumstances for life situation

11. _____ Tries to control everything, including me

12. _____ Immature, impulsive, and/or irresponsible

13. _____ Emotionally distant or void, aloof

14. _____ Still pining for a past relationship

15. _____ Wants me to make their sad life better

16. _____ Married or otherwise unavailable to commit to me

17. _____ Active addiction, addictive behavior (rationalized as “not a problem”)

IV. Other Common Red Flags

18. _____ Is pessimistic and negative about things that matter to me

19. _____ Lacks integrity in dealing with people, money, etc.

20. _____ Judgmental attitude toward themselves & others

21. _____ Unwilling to self-examine, accept feedback, take responsibility

22. _____ Doesn’t keep agreements

23. _____ What they say about themselves doesn’t match reality
24. _____ Emotional roller coaster, recurring or regular emotional drama

25. _____ This isn’t what I really want, but I don’t want to be alone

26. _____ Changeable, inconsistent behavior

27. _____ Inability to listen

28. _____ I notice myself trying to change this person to fit what I want, instead of accepting them for who they are

29. _____ Talks too much (especially about self), monopolizes conversation

30. _____ Overly quiet, withdrawn

Results

A. Total checked items from Section II, III, and IV _______

B. Circle the checked items that need close attention, decision-making, or require more information.

C. On a scale from 0 (Not at all) to 100 (Perfect fit) my minimum score for considering any relationship is _______

D. Using the above scale I score this potential relationship _______

E. Based upon the above results, I… should / shouldn’t (circle one) proceed dating this potential partner.

**Note:** If it’s clear you should not proceed dating this potential partner and you have any difficulty moving on, we strongly suggest showing this checklist to
your best friend, close family member, therapist or coach and get the support you need to be The Chooser.
Relationship Status Questionnaire

Most unmarried or pre-committed couples tend to describe their relationship as “committed,” which can mean very different things to each partner.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to help you determine the status of your relationship so you can be clear and on the same page with each other.

Please skip if you are married or in a committed relationship.

____ 1. I plan on spending the rest of my life with my partner.

____ 2. I want to be married to my partner.

____ 3. I’m unsure of the future of this relationship.

____ 4. My friends thinks we’re a committed couple.

____ 5. My family thinks we’re a committed couple.

____ 6. I like our Boyfriend/Girlfriend relationship and am in no hurry to change that.

____ 7. My partner believes we’re committed, but I’m not there yet.

____ 8. I’m committed to our relationship, but my partner isn’t there yet.

____ 9. We have discussed our future and are on the same page about it.

____ 10. We’ve discussed commitment but haven’t done anything about it.

____ 11. We’ve taken steps towards commitment (living together, buying...
property, having a child, etc) but we have no concrete plans to marry.

____ 12. We’ve taken steps towards commitment (living together, buying property, having a child, etc) and have a plan/time-line towards commitment or marriage.

____ 13. I don’t believe in commitment and prefer to stay in the relationship as long as it works.

____ 14. My partner doesn’t believe in commitment and prefers to stay in the relationship as long as it works.

____ 15. We have a made a formal, explicit commitment to each other privately.

____ 16. We have a made a formal, explicit commitment to each other in a ceremony witnessed by others.

Based upon the above results, I define our relationship as-

____ Committed (Lifetime partners)

____ Pre-Marital (Engaged to be married)

____ Pre-Committed (Exclusive, but not yet committed)
Relationship Choice Questionnaire

Use this questionnaire to assist you in making a successful long-term choice about your pre-committed relationship.

I. Projecting the Future:

1. _____ Would I want to spend the rest of my life with this person exactly as they are?

2. _____ Would I want this person to raise my child?

3. _____ Would I want my child to be exactly like this person?

II. Are You Talking Yourself Into a Relationship?

4. _____ Do I want to rescue or “help” them because I see their potential?

5. _____ I love the way they look or their status and it builds my self-esteem to be with them.

6. _____ We have some things in common and so I’m avoiding looking at glaring differences.

7. _____ They appear to be totally different than people I’ve been with in the past.

8. _____ I’m focusing on one important quality (money, sex, fun, humor, etc) and ignoring unmet requirements.
III. Danger Signs

9. _____ Reacts to frustration with anger, rage, blame

10. _____ Blames others or circumstances for life situation

11. _____ Tries to control everything, including me

12. _____ Immature, impulsive, and/or irresponsible

13. _____ Emotionally distant or void, aloof

14. _____ Still pining for a past relationship

15. _____ Wants me to make their sad life better

16. _____ Married or otherwise unavailable to commit to me

17. _____ Active addiction, addictive behavior (rationalized as “not a problem”)

IV. Other Common Red Flags

18. _____ Is pessimistic and negative about things that matter to me

19. _____ Lacks integrity in dealing with people, money, etc.

20. _____ Judgmental attitude toward themselves & others

21. _____ Unwilling to self-examine, accept feedback, take responsibility

22. _____ Doesn’t keep agreements

23. _____ What they say about themselves doesn’t match reality
24. _____ Emotional roller coaster, recurring or regular emotional drama
25. _____ This isn’t what I really want, but I don’t want to be alone
26. _____ Changeable, inconsistent behavior
27. _____ Inability to listen
28. _____ I notice myself trying to change this person to fit what I want, instead of accepting them for who they are
29. _____ Talks too much (especially about self), monopolizes conversation
30. _____ Overly quiet, withdrawn

Results

A. Total checked items from Section II, III, and IV _______

B. Circle the checked items that need close attention, decision-making, or require more information.

C. On a scale from 0 (Not at all) to 100 (Perfect fit) my minimum score for considering any relationship is _______

D. Using the above scale I score this relationship _______

E. Based upon the above results, I… should / shouldn’t (circle one) continue this relationship.

Note: If it’s clear you should not continue this relationship and you have any difficulty moving on, we strongly suggest showing this checklist to your best
friend, close family member, therapist or coach and get the support you need to be The Chooser.
What's Next?

Now in it's 20th year, the Communication Map provides easy-to-follow strategies to resolve conflict and create more meaningful relationships. In just 47 minutes (the time needed to review the audio or video tutorial) this user-friendly system teaches you to communicate more effectively and provides a great tool for helping others as well. Used by thousands of relationship coaches worldwide, The Communication Map is Relationship Coaching Institute’s most popular product!

ORDER your copy of the Communication Map, check out the ebook, and watch a video tutorial!

www.relationshipcoachinginstitute.com/communication-map/
DOWNLOAD this free program for couples:

*Beyond Happily Ever After:*

*5 Strategies for a Radical Relationship*

http://www.relationshipcoachinginstitute.com/beyondhappilyeverafter
Years ago I created this tool when struggling with my own relationship, and it worked really well. Then, I started using it with my clients and they loved it.

When I started Relationship Coaching Institute I added it to the strategies we use for coaching couples and it has been used successfully by hundreds of coaches with thousands of couples over the years. This tool can be used in the context of relationship coaching and it’s simple enough that a couple can use this on their own with excellent results (as long as they both participate).

It’s free, it’s easy, and you’ll love it!

**LEARN** My All Time Favorite Relationship Coaching and Self-Help Tool for Couples (other than The Communication Map!)

Take this free relationship assessment for couples.

coupleforlife.com/couplesassessment/

EXPLORE these great FREE resources for couples from Relationship Coaching Institute:

www.coupleforlife.com/free-stuff
VISIT our blog for the latest relationship information, tools and resources!

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FIND a relationship coach!

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GET your FREE Relationship Coach Starter Kit!

www.relationshipcoachinginstitute.com
About the Author

David Steele

Relationship Coaching Institute Founder, Author, Relationship Coaching Pioneer, and global authority on growing a profitable private practice, David Steele is making a profound impact for coaches, therapists, the media, clients and those seeking to make conscious life partner choices around the world. As a subject matter expert and author, the cornerstones that are the foundation David's worldwide contributions include:

• Serving as chief ambassador and member support officer for the members and clients of the Relationship Coaching Institute;
• Guiding coaches, therapists, and those aspiring to careers in either arena as a sought-after speaker, trainer, and workshop leader on practice building, honoring three decades of thought leadership in the field and his recent book From Therapist to Coach: Leveraging Your Clinical Expertise to Build a Thriving Coaching Practice - published in 2011 by John Wiley & Sons Inc.;
• Unabashed advocate of helping professionals earning six and seven figures while making a significant difference in the world as a popular

- Offering relationship expertise and perspectives to the media, based on lessons shared in his book and related programs *Conscious Dating: Finding the Love of Your Life in Today’s World*

David welcomes speaking invitations, media interviews, quantity book purchases, and other opportunities that allow him to fulfill his life mission to vastly improve the success rate of committed relationships worldwide.

Contact David [here](#)

Read this great interview with David Steele in Published! magazine [here](#)