

Marriage is a Job

Marriage is a job and we'd all be a lot better off if we approached it that way.

Think about the similarities: In order to get a job or a spouse, you dress up, behave unnaturally, and hide those little things that might be a deal-breaker, like your crazy mother or the fact that you save your cat's hair in baggies. Once you've achieved your objective, whether it's getting hired or walking down the aisle, both have a "honeymoon period," where no one really expects you to buckle down and get to work right away.

And anyone who has managed to stay married longer than Renee Zellwegger and Kenny Chesney did, can tell you that once you've gotten past the interview and the honeymoon period, everyday married life can be just as boring and frustrating as the 9 to 5 world. There are power struggles to determine who is the alpha dog (which can be confounded in marriage if there actually is a dog), budget cuts, people behaving like children (they may, in the case of marriage, BE children), changes in management, walk-outs, etc. There isn't a married person in the world who hasn't dreamed of not clocking in for a day (or a week or a month).

Why is it then that with all their similarities that when someone decides to change jobs, we admire their ambition and encourage them to follow their bliss, but if someone makes the same choice about a spouse, we feel sad and disappointed? Why do we say "failed marriage" but not "failed occupation?"

I'm not talking about quickie jobs and divorces, but those things we've poured ourselves into, learned our lessons, and decided to move on from. Jobs and marriages are ways of learning about ourselves and our needs.

I myself have had three occupations and three husbands (in both cases, I still have the third). My first job out of college, I was an “Economic Analyst” for a bank corporation. I know that sounds so 80’s, and it was. But the fancy title was cover for the fact that I was basically just an underpaid researcher who had to run computer models before the actual invention of computer. Okay, the computer had been invented, but at the bank we were still using the abacus and slide rule.

I managed to stay at this job for eighteen months, and during that time I learned a few things about myself: (1) I didn’t enjoy working for people who take credit for my work, (2) I really hate wearing panty hose and heels every day, and (3) Bosses who criticize your job performance in their office then feel you up in the elevator are fairly easy to get a good letter of references from, especially if you know the guys who run the elevator video camera (yes, the bank did have those).

I lasted ten years in my first marriage. We met in high school, married right out of college and moved across country twice. I quit work and went to grad school. He quit work and formed his own computer company, making \$100 an hour, which was real money in the 80s. I was making about \$6 an hour. I learned from my first marriage job that anyone who values me based on my income isn’t someone I can sleep with for more than a decade. Hey, I have a long learning curve.

Job number two, I was a health educator who eventually ran a wellness program for a major university. There were things about the job I just loved and other things that made me want to spit in someone’s food. Unfortunately, that wasn’t a perk of the job. This is the job that taught me to be self-reliant, independent, capable of doing a lot with very little, and to value outrageousness in myself and others.

Husband number two was twenty-three when I met him in a bar. I was thirty-two. Did I mention the outrageousness factor? I made more money than he did, had had more sex than he'd had, and weighed more than he did. None of those turned out to be good things. I learned from him that I prefer to be the girl in the relationship at least half the time.

So I'm three for three now. I write and perform comedy. No one tells me when to get up or what to wear. No one feels me up on the job, not even the UPS man, not even when I beg. My co-workers are dogs, so the back-biting is literal instead of figurative. I like that. My current husband is slightly older and grayer than me, weighs more, and spends a lot of time sleeping, especially if there's nothing good on TV or I've dared to serve him a meatless entrée again in order to reduce his cholesterol.

Life goes on. And as long as you're learning something... anything... your job and your marriage probably still have a few good years in them. But it never hurts to keep your resume polished.

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