

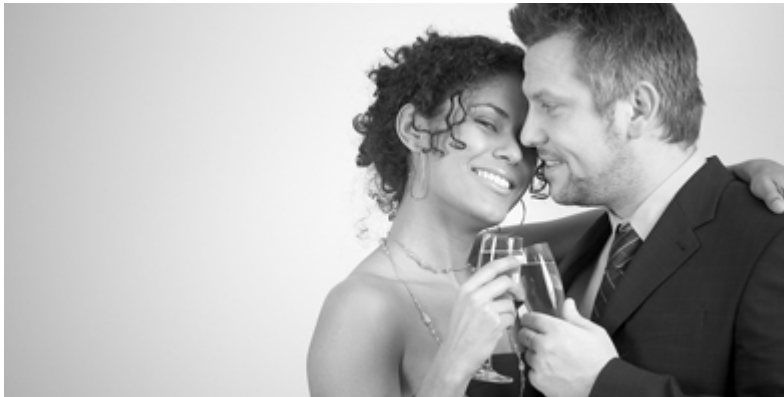
# hitched

## life advice

### Starting Fresh: A New Year for Your Marriage

9 Ways to make '09 the best year yet!"

BY DR. NOELLE NELSON



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Drink your champagne to making this year your best ever for your marriage.

The wedding presents have been put away, thank you notes dutifully sent off, you've made it through your first married Thanksgiving and Christmas or Hanukkah and are still on speaking terms with both sets of relatives and in-laws—huzzah! You feel good about yourself, your mate and your marriage. You hum a happy tune as you carefully remove the tree trimmings. Your spouse plucks an ornament off the tree and you grab his arm and exclaim, "What are you doing?"

Injured by your critical tone he frowns at you: "Putting away the tree ornaments, whaddya think?"

"Not like that," you hiss, rescuing your favorite "Snoopy the Snowman" ornament from his all-too-clumsy hands.

"Jeez!" he mutters, "It's not like I was gonna drop it." You roll your eyes. "What does that mean?" he demands.

"Nothing" you reply.

"Yeah, right" he says, grabbing the remote and zeroing in on football.

The glow of marital bliss is down to a mere ember. You gently unhook a keepsake ornament from the tree, unravel some tinsel and untangle the lights. You feel the resentment building up inside you: typical male—now he won't help at all. You'll have to do it all yourself. Maybe you'll go over to your sister's for the afternoon. At least she's fun.

Whoa! Stop the movie right there! This must be a tale of years past. You shake yourself. You are not going to let your new marriage go down the road of ugly relationships and failed romance.

You vow that 2009 will be a new year for your marriage, in every way. Banging diligently away at your computer, you write down the following nine ways to make '09 your best year yet.

#### 1. I will not say, "You're doing it wrong."

You vow not to automatically assume that just because your spouse does something differently than you, that he's doing it wrong. You promise to consider that there are many different ways to do pretty much anything, and that your husband's way of doing something is just different from yours, not better or worse. *Remember that criticism hurts,*

and it hurts most when it comes from someone we love.

**2. I will seek to understand why he/she is doing something rather than condemn it.**

You vow that either by observing what your spouse does or by asking out of genuine curiosity, you will learn why your mate reacts, responds or does what he does. You promise to become more interested in discovering how your spouse thinks and feels than in imposing your supposed superior ways. *When someone is genuinely interested in us, we turn towards them, we blossom and our love grows.*

**3. I will cherish the value our differences bring to our marriage.**

You vow to go beyond simply tolerating the differences between you, resentment barely hidden beneath tight-lipped acceptance, to seeing the benefit of those differences. His neatness and love of order bring structure to your disorganized life, suddenly you can find those keys, shoes and checks that used to go missing. Your more casual, spontaneous and nature brings lightness and fun into your lives. *Tolerating each other makes for lukewarm neutrality, cherishing makes for passion.*

**4. I will openly appreciate something about my mate every day.**

You vow that not a single day will go by without your expressing your appreciation and gratitude to your spouse. Whether it's, "I love waking up next to you," "Your smile just makes my day," "Thank you for picking up the dry cleaning" or "Thanks for reminding me of that appointment," you will let him or her know that you value all that your beloved is and does. *Appreciation is the food of love, never let your sweetheart go hungry.*

**5. I will greet my spouse with joy every day.**

You vow that regardless of how pissy your day was, how mopey, depressed, irritated or angry you are at the world, your work, your mother-in-law, etc., you will greet your spouse with a smile and the affection that flooded your being the day he said, "Will you?" and you said, "I do." *Nothing makes the heart happier than bringing joy to the one you love: gladden his heart daily.*

**6. I will see our disagreements as problems to be mutually solved—not conflicts between us.**

You vow that you will always stand next to your beloved, not against him, doing your best to see any situation from his point of view as well as yours, looking for that common ground which allows for creative problem-solving. It's never "me" against "you," but "we"—"How can we save for a new dryer and gym fees," not, "Well it's either a dryer or gym fees, tough!" *Disagreements are opportunities to become closer as you work together to create mutually satisfying solutions; you are never enemies, always allies.*

**7. I will quit pulling the "silent treatment" or otherwise fail to communicate.**

You vow that you will respect your husband or wife by communicating honestly what's on your heart and mind, rather than attempting to manipulate him into submission with silence, tears, yelling or nagging. You vow that if you have difficulty communicating, you can—and will—get help in doing so. *Requiring our mates to be mind readers or subjecting them to manipulative ploys are sure intimacy destroyers. A good marriage is loved, not conned, into being.*

**8. I will be quick to apologize and even quicker to forgive.**

You vow that you will accept you and your beloved's flaws and mistakes as just part of your common humanity. You promise to be accountable for your mistakes, make amends where appropriate and forgive without condoning. In other words, you will forgive your mate for being human and erring, then turn your mutual attention to the problematic behavior and work on that together. *To be human is to err, to forgive—divine. Be divine and reap the rewards of ever-flowing love.*

**9. I will give generously of my warmth, attention and affection.**

You vow that you will give readily of your time, your caring and your affection. You promise to take an enthusiastic interest in your mate's dreams and desires, his work, friends, hobbies and life. You promise to share your life, work, friends, hopes, dreams and fears with him as well. You promise to express your love freely physically, as well as emotionally, never withholding affection out of spite or to punish. You vow to recognize and value the special bond affection creates. *Love thrives when nourished with warmth, kind attention and true affection. Never take your love for granted, it will wither and die.*

You write "the end," close your computer and turn towards your one and only, softly snoring on the living room couch. You sit next to him or her, and snuggle up to his sweet self, ever so grateful to be married to this wonderful mate, warts 'n all, as you oh-so-carefully switch channels to your favorite cooking show with your marital bliss restored.

It's going to be a terrific New Year!

Noelle C. Nelson, Ph.D. is a psychologist, consultant, speaker and author. Her most recent book is "The Power of

*Appreciation in Everyday Life" (Insomniac Press, 2006). Her new book, "Your Man Is Wonderful" (Free Press) will be released in January 2009. For more than a decade, she has helped people live happier, healthier lives through appreciation—at work, at home and in relationships. For more than a decade, she has helped people live happier, healthier lives through appreciation--at work, at home and in relationships. E-mail: [nnelson@dr.noellenelson.com](mailto:nnelson@dr.noellenelson.com), website: [www.noellenelson.com](http://www.noellenelson.com).*