**How to Make Your Wife Happy**

**by Willard F. Harley, Jr., Ph.D.**

How are you doing in your quest to make your wife happy? If you're like most husbands, you often find yourself completely baffled by the complexity of it all. At first, you might have thought that there was nothing to it. Your wife (or girlfriend before she became your wife) was completely sold on you -- president of your fan club. But as your marriage grew, she began to express reservations. What once seemed like unconditional love has now become unending criticism. What's up?

Yes, I know that all marriages are not the same, and maybe you're a pro at being the man of your wife's dreams. If that's the case, read no further and wait for my next article to deal with a topic that's more relevant to you. But if you were with me throughout the first paragraph, read on.

When it comes to making marriage fulfilling for a wife, the "when mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy" approach dominates the thinking of many husbands. In this time-honored line of attack, a husband simply does whatever his wife wants, in the hope that he'll at least have peace and quiet. But peace and quiet doesn't turn out to be that easy. In fact, the more a husband reinforces a wife's "ain't nobody happy" part of the equation, the more skilled she becomes in making him miserable.

In many if not most cases, this "give her whatever she wants" approach to problem solving begins during courtship. In an effort to win her heart, he showers her with proof that he's the right one for her. *No one will ever care for you the way I will.* Then when she finally says, "I do," he's created a precedent. For a while, he tries to maintain that precedent, but one morning he wakes up to face the realization that while she gets pretty much whatever she wants, he's left with little to show for his effort. His wife might like being able to get her way, but he's getting nothing in return.

So he decides to change his approach. Instead of giving her whatever she wants, he takes charge and makes decisions that are in his best interest. If she's willing to let him suffer to get what she wants, how about a little reciprocity? Why can't she do a little suffering to get what he wants?

But his wife doesn't see his point. Thus begins the "ain't nobody happy" response that I mentioned above. That response, of course, does not endear her to him. In fact, it makes him wonder why he had tried so hard to make her happy in the first place. *If she's unwilling to suffer to make me happy, I'll just make myself happy and try to ignore her.* That strategy, of course, usually leads to infidelity and divorce.

The problem in this scenario that I've described is in the goal of marital conflict resolution. It's a win-lose goal that starts from the very beginning of courtship. When one spouse wins, the other loses. In the beginning, he's willing to lose so that she can win. But eventually he expects her to do a little losing so he can win once in a while. When that's not forthcoming, at least to his satisfaction, he tries to win without her consent by making decisions independently. That's another win-lose goal.

My position on conflict resolution in any romantic relationship is that whenever a couple has a conflict, their choice should not be between doing whatever he wants or whatever she wants (win-lose), but rather doing what they both want (win-win). They could avoid all of the unpleasantness I've been describing by simply accepting this basic premise.

My goal for husbands who want to make their wives happy is for them to limit their choices to win-win solutions to all marital conflicts. And I put a great deal of effort into helping them learn to achieve that objective. Why just husbands, you may ask? Why not put equal effort into helping wives? Well, I'd like to be able to put equal effort into helping both spouses, but I usually find myself focusing most of my attention on husbands because they're the ones who resist finding win-win solutions the most. Women usually seem to see the wisdom of it almost immediately, while it usually takes men a while longer to catch on.

My overarching goal in marriage is for a husband and wife to be in love with each other. And that goal is achieved by making as many [Love Bank](http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3200_love.html) deposits and as few withdrawals as possible. Win-win solutions to marital conflicts achieve that objective. Win-lose solutions do not.

So convincing a husband that he should always strive for win-win solutions to marital conflicts is my first and most important step in helping him learn to make his wife happy. Even when she gets her way in a win-lose solution, it's not necessarily a happy outcome for her because she knows that he wasn't happy making her happy.

I'm reminded of the Bible verse, *Every man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Corinthians 9:7). We feel the same way that God feels about giving. We don't want our spouse to give us what we need reluctantly or compulsively. We want it to be given cheerfully. So if a husband is to make his wife really happy, he should give her what she needs with enthusiasm -- just like the [Policy of Joint Agreement](http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3500_policy.html) recommends. It should be a win-win resolution to a conflict.

Cheerfulness in giving isn't something we can force ourselves to do, and we certainly shouldn't fake it. Instead, we should discover ways to do things for each other in marriage that creates genuine cheerfulness for both spouses.

When Joyce and I were first married, we could only afford to go out once a month. I thought it would be fun to try something a little different -- a Japanese restaurant. Joyce went along with my idea until we were served the appetizer: Seaweed and octopus. She burst into tears. We left the restaurant, and sat in our car until we were able to agree on another restaurant that we would both look forward to trying. A Chinese restaurant and the Policy of Joint Agreement saved the evening.

That experience and a host of others that I had with Joyce taught me that her reaction to disappointment is far more emotional than mine. I would never have been that upset about a bad dining choice. And I care so much about her that I was very tempted to simply ask her what makes her happy, and go along with it, regardless of how I felt. But that would have been a mistake. We had to learn how to make win-win decisions whenever we faced a conflict.

It's all about having an uncompromising win-win goal and a tried and proven process for achieving that goal. If I can convince a husband that their goal for resolving all conflicts must be a mutual enthusiastic agreement, and that the process of coming to that agreement must focus on mutual respect and understanding for differences in perspective, they're on a path to successful conflict resolution.

First, the goal: *Never do anything without an enthusiastic agreement between you and your spouse.* It's the Policy of Joint Agreement. Regardless of how trivial the decision might be, a couple should get into the habit of negotiating with each other until they come to an enthusiastic agreement. Capitulation on either spouse's part should never be tolerated. And trying to force your solution onto your spouse is abusive and controlling -- it leads to marital disaster. This goal is described in much greater detail in the Basic Concepts section of the Marriage Builders website as Basic Concept #9. <http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3500_policy.html>

Second, the process: *Brainstorm possible solutions with respect for each other's perspectives until you are in enthusiastic agreement.* I call that process, Four Guidelines for Successful Negotiation. Simply stated, these guidelines encourage spouses to consider each other's feelings and interests whenever there is a decision to be made. As lifetime partners that affect each other in everything that they do, they should act as if they are one entity. These four guidelines are described as Basic Concept #10.<http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi3350_guide.html>

Giving your wife whatever she wants isn't the way to make her happy. Since you are now partners in life, and everything you do will affect each other, what you do for her must make you happy, too. Otherwise, she will feel unfulfilled and frustrated with your reluctant efforts.

The same is true for the way your wife should try to make you happy. She should do it in a way that she would enjoy. Trying to force her to sacrifice her own enjoyment to meet your needs is not only thoughtless, but it is a formula for disaster. Whatever she enjoys doing, she will do often. What she doesn't enjoy, she will avoid doing. If you have a need that you want her to meet, be sure that she is a "cheerful" giver. Otherwise, your need will go unmet.

As it turns out, sacrificing your own pleasure so that your wife can be happy is the way to make her perpetually unhappy. Instead of making her feel fulfilled, it makes her feel frustrated, and you are likely to eventually give up. But if you meet her needs and resolve your conflicts enthusiastically, she will not only be happy and fulfilled, but you enjoy doing what it takes to make her happy for the rest of your lives together.

Do you want to make your wife happy? Meet her needs and resolve your conflicts in a way that makes both of you happy.