

## **Marriage: Work or Play?**

**By Mel Schwartz**

Most marriages and primary relationships these days tend to focus more on expediency and structure than on substance and content. In a culture that promotes getting the job done, efficiency regrettably takes precedence over fun. Many couples have become most proficient at getting the job done well. They manage the home, the children and work, but they seem to have lost the capacity to have fun together. They may work well together, but they don't often love well together.

The ever burdening list of things that must get done certainly get in the way of relating to one another and enjoying each other. Yet, if we don't properly prioritize our lives, the things begin to run us, rather than the other way around. We create distractions and having forgotten that we created them, run around in chaos trying to attend to them. In turn, this becomes our justification for not having time to attend to the more important matters in our lives.

Most relationships began with the simple experience of enjoying one another's company and on a very literal sense, the ability to have fun together. This comprised a core substance of the relationship. It is from this joyfully shared experience that two people typically decide to formalize their relations and in some cases marry.

The difficulty is that shortly thereafter, they tend to focus on the form of the relationship rather than content. No sooner does a couple decide to marry then they turn their attentions to wedding plans, seating arrangements, caterers, etc. Of course, these are necessary matters to be dealt with, but not to the exclusion of what bound the two people together to begin with: having fun together. From the inception of formalizing a relationship, the focus becomes external rather than continuing to honor the energy of the relationship.

As the years progress, the routine sets in and the relationship tends to become most predictable. The structure of the relationship becomes well formed, but often at the sacrifice of the couple's unique energy together. Too often, the capacity for wonder and play give way to the routine of the work. Quite often, when I ask couples who are struggling in their relationships, the last time they had a date, they look at me blankly. They can't recall. And if they do, it was likely the predictable Saturday night dinner with friends.

### *Uncertainty is the essence of romance*

With so much routine and predictability, it's small wonder our relationships and marriages tend to wither. As Oscar Wilde wrote, uncertainty is the essence of romance. Certainly, fun is a key ingredient for romance and fulfilling relations. These qualities require spontaneity and the ability to be truly present. If we have to calendar or schedule fun, it's most likely to be lacking in authenticity. Even the events that should be fun, such as sports, tend to become relegated to the domain of the mundane. Too much organizing makes for work, not fun. When I was a kid, the spontaneous energy of putting together a

group of friends for an impromptu ballgame created an energy of excitement. The engagement in spontaneously organizing a game provided a joy not equaled by the calendar's notation of the next scheduled game. The same is true in relationships. The spur of the moment is when the spirit emerges, not in the planning of a future event.

Seriousness plagues our lives. It is so easy in the stress of our day, to take it all so seriously. And this is often due to the long list of demands and chores to be checked off our checklist. Perhaps we should put fun on that agenda. When we remember to lighten up, the capacity to truly engage in and enjoy our partnerships with others emerges.

Mel Schwartz LCSW is a visionary psychotherapist, thinker and author who earned his graduate degree from Columbia University. He has been a keynote speaker at Yale University. Mel is the author of *The Art of Intimacy*, *The Pleasure of Passion* and is currently writing, *Emergent Thinking*®. He is the founder of the *Emergent Thinking*® Process. He is in private practice in Westport, CT. and Mt. Kisco, NY. Visit his web site at [www.MelSchwartz.com](http://www.MelSchwartz.com).