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Life

Author shares tips for a great marriage

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By VALERIE WEST
Of The Oakland Press

WEST BLOOMFIELD TWP. – Marriages in the United States have a 50-50 shot of working out, but a new book by Terri L. Orbuch, Ph.D., “Five Simple Steps to Take Your Marriage from Good to Great,” aims to use scientific research to improve those odds.

The book uses 22 years of research from the Early Years of Marriage project, which Orbuch led. In the project, more than 350 married couples from the area were studied during that time. The information from the study was then compiled into a readerfriendly book.

“I think in the area of marriage and relationships, this (book) is it,” Orbuch said. “This is the only self-help book that I know of in the popular press that has taken a landmark study, like the (Early Years of Marriage) study ... and made it accessible to people.”

As a marriage therapist and a research professor at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan and a professor at Oakland University, Orbuch was surprised by some of her own findings. One is that relationships actually get stronger when couples fall upon hard times, such as overcoming a death in the family or a miscarriage.

“People actually come back to the relationship and bond,” she said. “Seemingly, small stuff erodes a relationship. You’ve got to sweat the small stuff.”

In the book, Orbuch talks about popular relationship myths as well as communication between men and women.

In one example, she addresses how happy couples give affirmation, both with words and actions.

Surprisingly, she learned that men tend to need more affective affirmation than women, because women receive compliments on a more regular basis from peers than men do. This finding changed Orbuch’s marriage; she called her husband immediately and told him how “great” he was and how much she appreciated him.

It’s these small steps that Orbuch says can help improve a relationship.

“When you feel affirmed by your partner, you are much happier in your marriage,” she said. “Small changes over time can take your marriage from good to great. You can do it on your own first as an individual and second as a couple.”

The book also stresses communicating on a level other than just discussing household issues.

“We know that relationship ruts are common,” she said. “When they persist, they can erode happiness.”

She encourages couples to take time to do new and fun interests together as well as asking questions to get to know partners better.

Orbuch is seeking funding to continue studying the group, focusing on couples who have divorced and formed new relationships.

“Everyone is looking to take their relationship to the next level,” she said. “I take a very positive approach. I am a firm believer and my project supports it by adding positives rather than focusing on the negatives.”

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FYI

Terri Orbuch, a marriage expert and therapist, professor at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, and host of the weekly “Love Doctor Radio Show” on **VoiceAmerica.com** will discuss her book, “Five Simple Steps to Take Your Marriage from Good to Great” at 7 p.m. today at Borders Birmingham, 34300 Woodward Ave., (248) 203-0005. Following the discussion, she will be available to autograph books. She will also speak at the Jewish Book Fair at 11:30 a.m. Sunday at the Jewish Community Center, 6600 W. Maple Road in West Bloomfield Township. Her Web site is at www.drterriheloventor.com

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