

The Five-Year Marriage: Shifting the Marriage Paradigm by Annmarie Kelly

Your “Avoid at All Costs” List For Better Relationships

How do I know if s/he is “the one” for me? That’s a question I’m asked fairly often. The answer is easy. You don’t! Nobody knows. It’s a crapshoot, for sure.

BUT...that doesn’t mean you’re some victim of fate. In the Five-Year Marriage, I show women – and the men who love them – how to empower themselves and attract better relationships. Yes, you can stack the deck a bit and shift the odds in your favor. You start by looking for a partner who – most of the time – actively and regularly using the Five-Year Marriage Solid Seven behaviors and who *doesn’t show up* with the “Avoid at All Cost” behaviors.

That’s just one of the ways you can shift the marriage paradigm in your favor! And it’s big!

The interesting part, and it’s kind of scary too, is that you don’t always see them right away. In fact, at first, they seem harmless. In fact, dating someone with the “avoid” behaviors might be fun if you’re having an affair or just looking at a short term relationship. *You know*, there’s something about dating one of the “bad boys” that might kick up your adrenaline and make you feel like you’re living “on the edge.” It can be almost exciting - short term - but not healthy for the long term. In fact, they are behaviors that will be disastrous for your Five-Year Marriage.

What are those “avoid at all costs” behaviors? There are four of them: addiction, narcissism, sociopathy, and domestic violence. Every single one of them have absolutely no place in a Five-Year Marriage. Here’s what they mean for you:

Addiction

Addiction means having a compulsion toward one particular activity. Someone’s addiction, before you realize it’s an addiction, can actually be fun. The person who likes to drink might seem like a fun partier who knows how to have a good time. It doesn’t bother you that s/he drinks too much because you’re enjoying going to various bars, meeting new people, and other fun things. However, it’s usually only fun (or maybe just okay) at the beginning when you are still infatuated. Sadly, addictive behaviors get old fast.

Addiction includes a cadre of behaviors that do not support the Five-Year Marriage. It does not matter what the addiction is: food, alcohol, drugs, gambling, bulimia, sex, work, or anything else. If your partner is addicted, that means that s/he has one focus – getting the next fix. The focus isn’t where it should be – on you, your relationship and your shared goals and dreams. It never will be.

While some addictions can be easy to spot, many addicts are high-functioning. That means a person can go about daily life and conceal the addiction for a long time. Some alcoholics only drink on the weekends. Some drug addicts use their drug of choice to enhance performance. They're uber-creative or they seem to be tireless, and they are an asset to the job or relationship.

I know one woman who has a high-level position in her company. She doesn't drink on the job, but she starts drinking as soon as she gets home. It's not unusual for her to go through a bottle of wine in an evening, and to do it several times a week. Friday night is a party that ends when she calls a car service to take her home from the bar. Saturday lunch and Sunday brunch begins with a glass of wine or a mimosa and doesn't stop until her conversation is incomprehensible. However, when Monday morning rolls around, she's back at work, functioning well and doing her job.

High-functioning addicts aren't easy to detect. But addictions, no matter what they are, are costly. And it's not just financial. For everyone around the addict, there is untold stress, both dealing with the addict and handling the addictive behaviors.

If you aren't sure if your prospective partner has an addiction, but you suspect something's going on, start looking for missing chunks of time that don't have a good explanation. Or a money shortage that doesn't make any sense. Don't dismiss your gut feeling as a lack of trust, lack of loyalty, self-blame, or anything else that says you are making a mountain out of a molehill, even though the addict will tell you that you are.

Addicts are often good at masking the behavior and giving the appearance of being in possession of all seven "must-have" behaviors. But their act cannot continue indefinitely.

Eventually, addiction becomes a third, life-sucking party in a relationship. Addiction is a diabolical lover.

You have to be clear inside yourself: In the Five-Year Marriage, there is only room for you, your partner and the life you are creating together. Addition (and any of the "Avoid" behaviors are deal-breakers in any relationship.

Do you notice addictive tendencies - or - have any of your family or friends noticed something and mentioned it to you?

Narcissism

Narcissism seems to be rampant these days. The quirky thing about narcissists is that they often don't appear, at first, to be self-centered. In fact, in the beginning, a narcissist can make you feel like you are really, really important. S/he can even tell you that you "saved" them – for example, you saved them from the pain of the last relationship, or from being lonely, and more. That's because the narcissist, in the early stages, sees you as an extension of his or her own self. It's as though his/her sun is shining on you, and the narcissistic light s/he exudes warms you and makes you feel good.

Until that brightness dims or sparkles in another direction. And it always does.

At some point you start to notice that, when s/he tells a story, s/he is at the center of the action and looking good. In fact, every story convinces you that s/he is the best at everything: the best participant at some sport or in some meeting, the best cook, knows the best people, gives the best advice, is the best at helping people, motivating others, solving problems, and on and on. Also, s/he has a habit of trying to top everyone else's stories with a personal best story.

In the early stages of your relationship, you pretend not to mind. You ignore any negative feelings when the red flags and screeching warning bells going off in your head. After all, the way s/he acts makes you feel good – like you're part of something bigger. You like it; it's part of the attraction.

Before too long, however, the narcissistic tendencies intensify. Conversations now focus on the latest fabulous thing s/he did – in everything from a workplace task to making hamburgers on the grill. When a conversation focuses on you or anyone else, s/he interjects a comment that shifts the focus back to him/her.

Over time s/he ignores your boundaries and doesn't keep promises. S/he acts as though the rules are for others; s/he believes s/he can get away with anything.

Gradually, the sunlight that once made you feel so good starts fading until you are left out of the equation. You wonder what you did that changed things.

Narcissism is a personality disorder defined by Merriam-Webster as “egoism” and “excessive concern for oneself with or without exaggerated feelings of self-importance.” According to the Mayo Clinic, “Narcissistic Personality Disorder involves arrogant behavior, a lack of empathy for other people, and a need for admiration – all of which must be consistently evident at work and in relationships. People who are narcissistic are frequently described as cocky, self-centered, manipulative, and demanding.”

As your partner's sense of self-entitlement and self-importance grows around you, you begin to feel shut off. S/he becomes high maintenance. You find it exhausting.

When you stop blaming yourself for not being able to live up to the narcissist's expectations, you get weary of the counter-productive behaviors. You try to discuss your feelings but, unfortunately, a person with narcissistic tendencies is very thin-skinned. S/he doesn't take well to criticism, even when it's constructive.

In the Five-Year Marriage, narcissism means you won't problem-solve very well. Every effort to express your feelings, if those feelings don't shine a positive light on your partner, are met with anger and/or condescension. Eventually you feel muzzled.

As a result, the whole focus of your relationship is making your partner feel good. You have no voice. You feel bad – about the relationship and yourself.

Narcissism is too much work in the Five-Year Marriage, which is already hard enough. Do you want to make extra work for yourself?

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is always about power and control. It usually includes various forms of physical, verbal, and emotional mistreatment. Early signs of physical abuse could include pushing, shoving, and outright hitting. It might even show itself as control over money, if lack of money takes away from basic needs.

Verbal abuse comes in the form of constant criticism, vile name calling, accusations, blaming, and even demeaning jokes. Even withholding information can sometimes be considered verbal abuse. However it is delivered, verbal abuse is designed to humiliate or degrade.

Emotional abuse is a behavior which is designed to destabilize your personal power and self-esteem. It's marked by behaviors such as bullying, intimidation, shaming, and other actions that undermine a partner's confidence.

In my book, *Victorious Woman! Shaping Life's Challenges into Personal Victories*, I told Lilly's and Nancy's stories of domestic abuse. Lilly, the soft-spoken fourth child in her Puerto Rican family, was a classic good girl. Her mother suffered from a debilitating lung disease and, through most of Lilly's teenage years, she was her mother's caregiver. When her mother died, at age forty-seven, Lily felt lost. It wasn't long before she met "a slightly older man who wore nice suits, looked good and 'knew stuff.'" Lilly fell in love with him almost immediately. He quickly exerted control, moving Lilly out of town, and far away from her siblings and friends.

In the years that followed, Lilly wasn't allowed to talk to her family unless her spouse was around. While he came up with one get-rich-quick scheme after another, he made Lilly work in minimum-wage jobs; he controlled the money. If Lilly didn't follow his orders, there was hell to pay.

Nancy's story was similar. She married a divorced man with three children and moved from Virginia to Pennsylvania. Nancy said her life revolved around running the household according to the dictates of her controlling husband. He drank heavily and got her involved in one scheme after another. By the time she had three children of her own, she became increasingly more frightened for her safety and the safety of the children.

Looking back, both Lilly and Nancy said the seeds of domestic abuse were present while they were dating. However, both said they were too naïve to realize it.

It was only after years of abuse that Lilly and Nancy left their abusive relationships. When they did, both Lilly and Nancy became single mothers without financial input from the abusers.

If abuse happens in a Five-Year Marriage, you have a better opportunity to extricate yourself from an abusive man or woman. Also, presuming you figured out child custody and divorce finances before you entered into the marriage, you might have an easier time getting through a divorce.

However, why go through that? An abusive man or woman will almost always give some hint of abusiveness, even before the engagement. Isolation is a tool the abuser employs to limit contact with friends and family. The abuser will stalk you when you aren't with him or her. S/he will distract you from your family and friends and find ways to distance them from you.

If, while dating, you aren't sure if you are in an abusive relationship, the internet provides a plethora of information. In addition, movies like *Sleeping with the Enemy*, *What's Love Got to*

Do with It, and The Burning Bed each describe life with a controlling spouse who makes irrational demands on the person they profess to love. When those demands aren't met, the control freak spouse meets out a variety of punishments.

All domestic abuse does is suck the life out of your soul. It's better to pay attention before you make a commitment. Learn the signs and notice it from the beginning; quit while you're ahead.

Sociopathy

The Sociopath acts much like the narcissist, *except* that sociopathy is narcissism on steroids. Sociopaths are pathological liars who are usually very smart, glib, and successful. Many sociopaths are charmers and exhibit overt sexual behaviors.

When you meet a sociopath, you are likely to think you've found your perfect match. S/he can convince you of everything and talk you into anything that satisfies some bizarre selfish need. To say the sociopath is manipulative is an understatement.

One of the telltale signs of sociopathy is that, when s/he gets caught in a lie, s/he is likely to brush it off like it's no big deal. To the sociopath, it isn't.

Sometimes a sociopath will seem remorseful. Don't fall for it. S/he can even get away with that for a while. Eventually it becomes clear to you that it's an act, and clearly any expression of remorse or guilt is meaningless. The sociopath only regrets not getting what s/he wants.

In the early 1990s there was the famous Long Island, New York, case that attracted worldwide attention and sparked a media frenzy. A teenager, Amy Fisher, was in love with the married, thirty-something Joey Buttafuoco. One day Amy drove to Joey's house and knocked on the door. When Joey's spouse, Mary Jo, opened the door, Amy shot Mary Jo in the face.

Mary Jo survived the shooting. For years, living with a bullet lodged in her head, she believed the story of innocence that her high school sweetheart and spouse of twenty-plus years insisted was true. Mary Jo and Joey were on all the news magazine shows. They were even the consultants for a made-for-TV movie about what happened to Mary Jo. All the while, Mary Jo defended Joey.

Unfortunately, Joey's whole story was a lie. He was indicted on nineteen counts of statutory rape, sodomy, and endangering the welfare of a child. He eventually pleaded guilty and served jail time.

In 2009, Mary Jo wrote *Getting It Through My Thick Skull: Why I Stayed, What I Learned, and What Millions of People Involved with Sociopaths Need to Know*. She wanted to tell her story, but she also wanted to inform others about the perils of living with a sociopath. Mary Jo wrote that, after the couple divorced, it was her son who told her the hard truth about her ex-husband. Mary Jo said that, at first, she couldn't believe what her son was saying. She was stunned by the peculiar revelation.

So, that night, Mary Jo spent a few hours doing internet research. That's when, she said, "the lights went on." She says she learned "the missing piece to an infuriating puzzle." It answered decades-old questions in her mind that included, "Why was our marriage in such constant turmoil?" and "Why was I continually off-balance and bewildered?"

Interestingly, most sociopaths can have long-term relationships and even marriages. In fact, the average sociopath probably has several of them. That's likely because, for the partner of a sociopath, it takes about five years to figure out that you're in a bad situation. It could take much longer to come to terms with your own disillusionment and then disentangle and get free. For Mary Jo, it was thirty years.

Save yourself the trouble. Sociopaths are very definitely not made for the Five-Year Marriage.

Evaluating Must-Haves and Avoid-at-All-Costs

Before looking at your prospective Five-Year Marriage partner, do some self-evaluation. Are you the kind of person who would be a good Five-Year Marriage Partner? If you are, what makes you a good partner? If not, how not?

If you are a good partner, you will be focused on BE-ing the person who has most (or all!) of the "must-haves" and none of the "avoid" behaviors. It's the smartest thing you can do for yourself if you want a Five-Year Marriage partnership. Why? Because when you are the best partner for a Five-Year Marriage, you are most likely to seek and attract the same kind of partner.

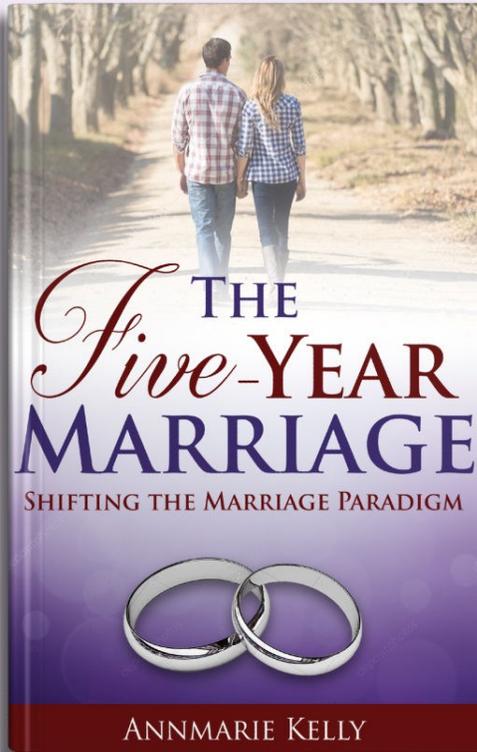
Next, when you are considering a Five-Year Marriage, take time to notice if your prospective partner has the seven "must-have" behaviors. Nobody, including you, has to be perfect. But your partner has to have (at least) a decent sensibility for things like personal responsibility and fairness. That's what you need to build the energy and the vision that has the strongest potential for creating a solid Five-Year Marriage.

Keep in mind that looks and passion change over time. When they do, all the "must-have" traits I talk about in *The Five-Year Marriage* start to shine. Being able to have a conversation and a respectful disagreement with someone or knowing that person is there for you in a pinch – those things become very, very attractive, even sexy.

Meanwhile, the "avoid at all costs" behaviors can become killers (sometimes literally!).

Did you like what you read in this excerpt?

**You can read about the Solid Seven
And much more in my new book
The Five-Year Marriage: Shifting the Marriage Paradigm.
It's available on Amazon here: <https://amzn.to/2pGCKUZ>**



THE *Five*-YEAR MARRIAGE

Marriage is old school! It needs a makeover, a change in the way couples live their marriage - a paradigm shift that makes sense for today's world. That's the Five Year Marriage!

The Five-Year Marriage is a logical way to recognize and respond to change - in your life, your relationship, and your marriage. It empowers both partners, enabling them to both live their best life. The Five-Year Marriage is for today's couple who wants something more and better in marriage and is willing to work to get it. And it's for married couples who are ready to refresh and recommit in a whole new way.

In the Five-Year Marriage, you'll discover:

- **What it takes to be a good Five-Year Marriage Partner**
- **How to get your Five-Year Marriage started**
- **What to include in your Five-Year Marriage contract**
- **Ways to help you stick to your Five-Year Marriage agreements**
- **Tips for renegotiating your Five-Year Marriage contract**
- **and much more!**

The Five-Year Marriage is a **game-changer!**

It's really true that "almost nothing lasts sixty years anymore." Everything evolves and changes. The Five-Year Marriage is organized to help us have the power to advance this relationship with mindful adjustments, and as Annmarie says "create a marriage that you'll love living."

Maryann Volpe, married 51 years

How every modern marriage should be viewed; Annmarie Kelly has created a template for relationship longevity.

Helen Goltz, Journalist and Author

The Five-Year Marriage is a very compelling idea. I see many things that my spouse and I do in our marriage that keeps it good, and also many things I'd like to start doing! I found myself thinking of many people who could benefit from this book because it is a great book on relationships.

Wendy Mackowski, M.A., CPCC, CHT, Transformational Coach

Annmarie Kelly has been married six times, each time for just five years, and each time to the same man! Annmarie waited a long time to share the Five-Year Marriage with couples who want to shift the marriage paradigm in their favor. During the twenty-five years that Annmarie was working on her own Five-Year Marriage, this Mother of Modern Marriage built a successful business, SkillBuilder Systems, founded The Victorious Woman Project, and its annual fundraiser for women, The Girlfriend Gala, became an award-winning leader, author, women's empowerment speaker, and the host of the popular weekly radio show, the Friday Happy Hour. Annmarie is the author of two empowerment books for women, Victorious Woman! Shaping Life's Challenges into Personal Victories and Victory by Design: The Mid-Life Woman's Reinvention Guide.



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