

# Marriage is a Team Effort

Mark Hirschmann, PhD  
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

Anyone who watches a sport's franchise realizes that it takes time to build a dynasty. Work begins slowly with the fundamentals and builds one strength upon another. With team effort marriage can yield high levels of comfort, support and satisfaction.

## A. Challenges of Becoming a Team Player

*When love beckons to you, follow him,  
Though his ways are hard and steep.  
And when his wings enfold you yield to him,  
Though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound  
you.*

- A1. Less blaming each other for our problems
- A2. Less ignoring each other
- A3. Fewer disagreements popping up without warning
- A4. Less criticism of each other's abilities or beliefs
- A5. Less putting each other down as a person, parent, etc.
- A6. Fewer strong emotions dominating troublesome issues
- A7. Less raging in anger

## B. Building a Team

*Love one another, but make not a bond of love:  
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your  
souls.  
Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.  
Give one another of your bread but not from the same loaf.*

### More of these

- B1. Saying/hearing "thank you" for everyday tasks
- B2. Listening without trying to fix each other's problems
- B3. Apologizing for mistakes made
- B4. Gently introducing troublesome issues
- B5. Seeing each other's point of view, even though we disagree
- B6. Respectfully withdrawing from distressing arguments intending to return when emotions cool down
- B7. Appreciating what is at stake in this relationship

### C. Building a Winning Team

*Sing and dance together and be joyous,  
but let each one of you be alone,  
Even as the strings of the lute are alone  
though they quiver with the same music.*

#### More of these

- C1. Giving equal importance to each other's feelings, values, and beliefs
- C2. Seeking and accepting invitations for closer connection
- C3. Creating safe "relationship space" for each other
- C4. Risking and sharing feelings of inadequacy, fear, hurt or isolation
- C5. Comforting and listening to each other's deeper feelings and concerns

### D. Building a Dynasty

*Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.  
For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.  
And stand together yet not too near together:  
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,  
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's  
shadow.*

#### More of these

- D1. Expressing curiosity in each other's activities
- D2. Holding on to our own dreams
- D3. Supporting each other's dreams that are different from our own
- D4. Standing up for ourselves without putting each other down
- D5. Accepting the things in life that cannot be changed
- D6. Seeking agreement with each other about the "meaningful" things of life
- D7. Shifting from a life of constant "doing," to a life of peaceful "being"

The poetry is from "The Prophet" by Kahlil Gibran, 1923

The items A-D are based, in large part, on the work of John Gottman, in "Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work," 1999.