

# Dana Adam Shapiro Reviews the Lessons he Learned While Writing 'You Can Be Right (Or You Can Be Married)'



 By Michelle Danzig

After making a list of all the people that he knew, under 40, who were divorced, filmmaker and serial monogamist, Dana Adam Shapiro decided to answer the ultimate question: Why does love die? His book, *You Can Be Right or (You Can Be Married)*, contains 30 intimate interviews, where real people share the reasons why their marriages ultimately failed and their own important advice for others on keeping relationships alive. In an exclusive interview, Shapiro shares what it was like to write this intimate book, discusses the common reasons why he believes marriages fail and shares advice on what can be done to prevent this from happening.

**You have become pretty successful in the film industry, what made you want to write a book about divorce?**

The reason I was interested in the topic of divorce was because many of my friends started getting divorced. It started happening when I was 35. I guess people must have been going through that '7 year itch' (people that got married in their late 20s). I didn't realize how common divorce really is. I was incredibly surprised to hear that they were getting divorced each time because people are really good at putting on a show. Marriage is a great mystery: you never really know if they are happy, or even what the idea of happiness is. Some people may find it difficult to address the reasons they got divorced. Inevitably, because the interviews would not be

anonymous on camera, there really was no way to make a documentary about it.

### **What was it like asking people to open up about their failed marriages?**

I think the key to being a good interviewer is being genuinely interested in the topic. I was just genuinely, personally interested in what they were saying. This wasn't just an assignment, it was something I was truly curious about and wanted help with. I was literally asking for their advice. I wanted to learn what went on behind closed doors and what they did wrong that they could have done better. I think that came through. There were definitely times when I was listening to a story and I thought, "Wow, you really did that?" But of course, you can't say that in the middle of an interview. It's very rare that people are allowed to speak about these types of things. How often can you really open up to a therapist? I don't think there are that many opportunities for people to really open up about themselves. Most of the people said that they've never spoken so deeply about the issues before and at the end, the interview almost felt like an exorcism. I got to know these complete strangers in one interview better than their own friends know them.

**Related Link:** [When One Partner's Needs are More Important](#)

### **Almost all of the interviews are extremely intimate. Why do you think these first-hand accounts of failed marriages will benefit your readers?**

I think this type of hard-worn wisdom, for me, is more powerful and more provocative. All great drama has conflict and that is what these stories are about; the break ups. It was kind of the opposite of *When Harry Met Sally*, where everybody was sitting on the couch telling you how amazing their marriage is or their love-life is. My book, on the other hand, is really about how to learn from other people's

mistakes.

**What was the most common reason marriages failed for the people you interviewed?**

Personally, I think it's because people marry the wrong person. I don't think that most of the marriages that ended could have been saved. Many people get married too young and too quickly. Most of the time, in the courtship phase, when we're dating, there is a lot of 'airbrushing' going on; we really want to present ourselves to be as good and as strong as possible. Maybe we're even afraid to show our true selves because we just want so badly to get married. I think we tend to not see characteristics in our partner that may bother us. There is always the thought that, "Maybe they'll change." This alludes to how everyone talks about this idea of compromise. I believe it is essential, but there is such a thing as too much compromise. So many people woke up seven years into their marriage saying, "Where did I go?" or "Who am I?" People are so focused on trying to please their partner and becoming their ideal that in doing so they've lost themselves. The most important and first chapter in the book is called 'Accelerating the Inevitable'. Honestly, I think that the inevitable is that you're going to become yourself. Any attempt to alter your character in some way and please another person, or think that someone can fundamentally change to please you, is a recipe for disaster.

**What do you think are the most important things someone can do to prevent love from 'dying' in their relationship?**

I think you have to genuinely enjoy putting the other person before yourself. Because of fairy tales and movies, I think the idealization of love is corrupting what we believe it is supposed to be. To have a realistic idea of love is to really understand what it means to put another person completely before yourself. As a culture, I think we are getting more and more selfish. I think that's the problem because marriage is

really about the two of you. One of the things that kept coming up again and again, if you traced it back to the beginning, was that one spouse felt under-appreciated or neglected for some reason. I think it sort of festers into resentment or withdrawal. In many cases, this makes someone susceptible to the affection of other people and can lead to adultery or an affair. Ultimately, the reason the marriage ends is because two people simply grew apart and are living in the future thinking maybe it will get better.

**Has this helped you, in any way, in your own relationships?**

Yeah. It has definitely forced me to acknowledge all of these things about myself; to really just encourage my partner to be honest about who they are and for both of us to be vulnerable; to say, "If it doesn't work out, it's alright, it's not that you're wrong or I'm wrong, it's just that we are wrong about each other." I think to prioritize marriage or eternity is a slippery slope. If marriage can work out then that's great, but it's not the only result.

**Related Link:** [The Great Marriage Hoax: Why There's More to Life Than Getting Married](#)

**After writing this book, would you ever get married?**

Yeah, I would like to get married. I think that is the ideal. If it is a great marriage, then yes. I think bad marriages, however, are far more common and the idea of happiness is definitely a tough concept when it comes to marriage. I think this idea that 'You're mine until the day that I die' is a dangerous idea.

**Lastly, will there be any other books in the future?**

I'd like to do a book on alternative marriages; anyone who isn't doing the traditional marriage like swingers, bachelors, or communes. It could be interesting to see whether these situations are created by chance or by choice.

*You can purchase a copy of 'You Can Be Right (Or You Can Be Married): Looking for Love in the Age of Divorce' in bookstores and online from Amazon. For more information about Shapiro, you can visit his website [DanaAdamShapiro.com](http://DanaAdamShapiro.com).*