

Sherry Amatenstein Dishes on 'The Complete Marriage Counselor'



By Krissy Dolor

Everyone's seen the row of marriage self-help books on the shelves of the local bookstore. With so many to choose from, how can you pick just one? That's where Sherry Amatenstein comes in. This license master social worker decided to take the guesswork out of picking just one expert, and combined the country's best marriage counselors into one place. *The Complete Marriage Counselor: Relationship Saving Advice from America's Top 50+ Couples Therapists* offers a one-stop shop for all things marriage-related, tackling 101 of couples' most-asked questions, getting to what America's couples are really thinking.

What should you do if you're unhappy in your marriage?

Cupid's Advice:

Before committing to a counselor, check out Amatenstein's book. With her comprehensive research and knowledge in the field, her guide is as inclusive as you can get in less than 300 pages!

Cupid chatted with Amatenstein on the phone last month. Take a look at what the author had to say:

Your third book, *The Complete Marriage Counselor*, came out in January. How did you come up with the idea?

I do couples' therapy myself, and just sort of thought about it. When you have a medical concern, you go to a second doctor for another opinion. With couples, I thought it would be really great to pull together from the best in the business. Each chapter highlights a different issue – sex, money, goals, infidelity, and so on. I asked the therapists what their most popular questions were. Then for each question, I went to two different therapists, and asked their opinions for each question. I was sure to ask therapists who practiced different techniques. Then I gave my own take.

How did you determine who would contribute to the book?

I knew people from doing couples' therapy. With my background as a journalist, I sort of knew who people were, and went for my dream team. I was happy with everyone I got.

What were some of the most common themes in the questions that were selected?

The book is separated by issues, including marriage, house work, work, communication, handling rough patches, money, second marriage. What my book does is take a lot of typical patterns and issues that come up with couples. I took issues that hit home the most for couples. Also, parenting issues.

What is the number one relationship issue facing today's couple?

Trust. It's very hard to be vulnerable and really communicate what you're feeling. One of my sayings is, "underneath the anger is fear." When you can come to a place of empathy, and really understand the other person's point of view, it can really be a magical thing. According to a study, couples only hear only 30 percent of what the other person says. We often get caught up in ourselves. People forget a relationship should be a partnership, putting each other first, being open, and being vulnerable.

What's the most important concept you think your readers should take after reading this book?

I think, is it more important to be right, or is it more important to be happy? Instead of it being all about me, me, me, recall that John Kennedy quote – “ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country,” can be: “Ask not what your spouse can do for you, but what you can do for your spouse.”

One exercise I use for when a couple is roadblocked is to walk a mile in the other person's moccasins. By seeing how others have to deal with you can really be eye opening. You are really seeing each other's point of view.

I think the book is helpful for any couples in any stage of the marriage. I am happy when couples come to me even before they marry. A lot of people have this fantasy about the idea of marriage. If you think about the issues of marriage that will come up *before* getting married, you can build skills on working through them together, and stop getting into patterns – even if this leads the couple to realize, ‘we shouldn't be together.’