

Shrink Rap: Cherish is the Word

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Men, listen up! Here's the answer to keeping your wife or girlfriend happy for the rest of her life. You want to talk Valentines Day love and romance? This is a sure-fire way to make everyday feel like Valentines Day.

Here's the good word: Cherish. Yes, woman everywhere want above all else from their lovers to feel cherished. College sweethearts want it, those in new relationships want it, and even women having affairs want it. Women in long-term marriages crave it just as much as newlyweds do (if not more).

If you can consistently demonstrate in word and deed to your partner that she is cherished, nothing else will matter as much to her and you will have won her heart forever. This is one of the precious gems of truth in romantic relationships.

Women readers nodding in agreement to my revelation of the secret potion need only hand this column to your guy and tell him it's The Answer to the question, "What do women in love really want?"

So, what does it mean to cherish her? It means to treat her with tenderness and affection. It means to nurture her with care, to protect and aid her. It's to hold her dear, to encourage and foster her growth.

It's to adore her, paying attention to her thoughts, interests, beliefs, and, most of all, to her deepest feelings. When you cherish, you respect what she is feeling, even if you don't feel the same. Cherishing, then, implies honoring her and showing that respect in your everyday behavior.

Now, here's the first catch: Cherishing is not something you can fake-at least not for very long. Your partner can sense if you are being inauthentic. You may be able to get away with placating or kissing-up to her for awhile. But that's not cherishing her. Women know when they feel adored and cherished. That's why it's such a potent relationship elixir.

Here's the second catch: You won't cherish her without her touching your heart, opening you to experience her in an adoring way. Cherishing is an aspect of love that allows you to feel and express your delight in her uniqueness. Her smile makes you melt or her eyes have a twinkle that sends jolts of energy up your spine; maybe it's the way she laughs or wears her hair, or a certain way she has of poking fun at you-whatever it may be that touches your heart, your reaction is hold her in an adoring light.

One challenging part of this is that to allow yourself to cherish her, you have to be willing to give up your fear of losing control to her. Your wanting to please her can lead to your doing things for her that may make you feel subservient to her needs and desires. You are liable to mistake this for weakness. Also, the power of cherishing means you may be subject to getting "lost" in her if you don't maintain adequate ego boundaries.

Cherishing her doesn't mean never arguing. It doesn't mean saying "yes" when you need to say "no." Nor does it mean she is always going to look deliciously attractive to you or that you will not be subject to typical relationship stresses. But it does mean that whatever the challenges may be that you face as a couple, you'll always be just one glance, one hear-felt moment away from tuning into how much you adore her. And when she feels adoration radiating from your heart and reflected in your eyes, it will be easy for her to return it to you in spades.