

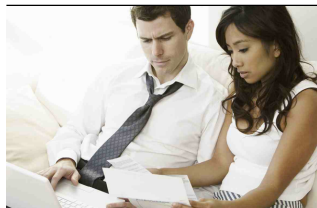
Financial Tips for a Happy Marriage

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Summer love is in the air and wedding season is just around the bend, but not all wedding talk is fireworks and butterflies. Associate Attorney at The Frutkin Law Firm, Stephanie Fierro, suggests that honesty and early action are the keys to a successful, happy and financially-stable marriage.



Fierro says that couples need to recognize that marriage is a legal commitment that will affect individual property rights. Understanding the commitment is especially important because Arizona is a community property state, meaning that property acquired during marriage is presumptively owned by both spouses. It's extremely important that all couples have an open dialogue and fully disclose what they own and what they owe before they get married. During these conversations, you may discover something disheartening that may change your feelings, so it's best to be completely honest with your partner. Information withheld can sometimes be considered similar to cheating in it could come back to haunt you and create issues later in marriage.

Even if one partner carries an extreme amount of debt, the other may still be comfortable getting married, combining finances and working on the best option to overcome the debt. Sometimes, however, the best option may be to wait until the debt is resolved to get married.

Fierro says that discussing "individual money management styles and whether you are comfortable with debt" is important because everything is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Agreeing on financial roles, sources of income and how to fix issues is personal.

The amount of debt one or both parties holds before marriage can also affect ownership. Debt should be evaluated before you buy property because it may change the way you take title to the property. For example, if a couple decides to purchase property while married, ownership is presumed equal between the couple unless agreed upon otherwise. If the individual with the least amount of debt decides to take sole responsibility of that purchase, it may help protect the couple against "creditor predators" of the debtor spouse but may also create issues in unfortunate cases of divorce.

Likewise, couples who are involved in business ventures also need to understand the roles, benefits and consequences of owning a business during a marriage.

Fierro says that the most common issues she sees between married couples occur because couples are not completely honest in their initial discussions. "Money is sensitive," Fierro says. Not having a complete disclosure is a "recipe for disaster."

Couples also get caught up in the mistakes of not continuing to plan and ignoring the "what if's" of financial struggle. "Preparation is the antidote for panic," Fierro says. Always consider the possibilities of job loss, health struggles, death or other situations that could cause strain on marriage and finances.

Planning for the future is key for a successful marriage. Be properly insured and consider creating and maintaining an estate plan, and invest in retirement accounts, even for a spouse that isn't working.

Fierro says that another reason to start talking, planning and resolving issues early is because fixing issues later on is often problematic, inefficient and is not cost-effective. Early financial planning is a key for a happily ever after.

Photo Credit: Marriage Matters Jackson, Marvelous Girl