

I Wasn't Happy in My Marriage Until My Husband Leaned In

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Chaunie Brusie

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Image Source: Chaunie Brusie

Because our voices are stronger together, we asked our bloggers to share their stories as part of Lean In's new [#LeanInTogether](#) campaign.

When I asked my husband to rate our marriage on a scale of 1-10, he shocked me by giving us a solid "4."

"Wait, which way is good?" he asked hurriedly. "I didn't understand the question."

After I got done rolling my eyes and explaining that 10 was the best, as pretty much all 1-10 scales in the history of the 1-10 scale are, he quickly revised his answer.

"Oh, I gotcha now," he said. "OK, then I give us a 6."

"What?!" I exclaimed. "What the heck? Why would you give us a 6??"

He smiled at me, albeit a bit smugly. "Just because I know there's so much more I could do to show you how much I love you."

Oh. Right.

The man's got me at every turn and after seven years of marriage, four kids, and many different jobs, one thing is abundantly clear for me: my husband really is a team player.

When we got married, we were still in college and could never have guessed what life would have in store for us. When I gave birth to our first daughter months later and stuff suddenly got really real, we set a precedent that would carry us into our lives today: we took turns supporting each other.

At exactly six weeks postpartum, I headed into my first job as a nurse, taking on the role of providing for our family while my husband finished up school by working night shifts. After graduation he found a job, was laid off, took another job, quit it, found another, and was laid off almost every year after for three more years. Simultaneously, I continued to clock in and out of the hospital to keep us afloat while we welcomed two more babies into the family.

Ready for a confession?

During the majority of that long time in our marriage, I was pretty unhappy.

And it wasn't until my husband supported me in making the career move that I had always dreamed of — from nurse to writer — that I finally felt like I was able to take a real, soul-deep exhale of relief.

I've read a lot of marriage advice that talks about the importance of finding your own happiness as an individual and not relying on your spouse for fulfillment. While I wholeheartedly agree with the truth in that statement, I've also come to see that when it comes to "having it all" as a wife and as a mother, I would not be where I am today without my husband. I am only able to do what I love and have the beautiful family that we do because my husband is 100% supportive of me.

So what does that support actually look like on a daily basis? Let's take a look.

1. Supporting each other's career goals

"I remember making a conscious decision that I had to unconditionally support you," my husband told me in our professional interview that was conducted across our bed while we took turns blowing raspberries on the baby's belly. "I decided that anytime you had a doubt, it was my job to put it down and tell you, 'Yes you can, you can do it,'" he explained.

And he has made good on his word and never ever doubted me. Not when I followed a crazy dream to become a magazine editor (a job that involved spending a night in a hotel once a week in another state) and not when I finally threw in the towel on my stable job as a nurse. Knowing that he had full faith in me gave me the confidence and the motivation to pursue the dreams I had.

2. Sacrificing for each other

And now for the truth. Although I'm feeling on top of the world right now, my husband still has some career goals that he hasn't reached yet and soon, it will be his turn.

Our truth has meant taking turns in our careers, supporting each other as we reached our goals of finishing graduate school, getting a book published, and starting a new business. At times that has looked differently for us and at times, if I'm being honest, that has meant that one of us has not been totally fulfilled. But it comes down to the big picture of helping each other reach individual goals while raising a family together.

3. Acknowledging individual happiness

According to my husband, the key to a successful marriage with two working partners and young children is pretty simple — it's about recognizing individual happiness. For some that may mean exploring different hobbies or exercising or traveling, but with limited time, it means being deliberate about how you need to spend that time to make you the most happy.

"Marriage has been exactly what I expected," my husband explained. "But what I didn't expect was how time-consuming four children would be and how little time there is for anything else."

For my husband and me, our individual careers happen to be the source of our individual sense of fulfillment. We both need those aspects of our lives to feel happy and we both know we need to give each other those things. As my husband explained, "Individual professional happiness translates into a good relationship." Or, in other words, supporting each other professionally *is* supporting our relationship as a couple.

4. Making choices

Supporting each other's careers does come at a price, just like "having it all" means making choices at different stages in life. For us, that means work is usually the focus of our lives. We don't do a lot of conventional date nights and leisure time is usually spent with family.

In other words, we're pretty boring. But we're happy.

5. Taking on the domestic work that works for you

When we first got married, I struggled for a few years thinking that because I was a working mother, having a "modern" marriage meant splitting the chores and the childcare 50/50. I wasted a lot of time and mental energy keeping track of what my husband did and didn't do and it wasn't until I made the decision to take on the domestic front as "my" responsibility that I was finally able to relax.

On a practical level, does this mean that I'm the one doing all of the chores at home 24/7 while my husband watches TV? Of course not. He's no stranger to scrubbing toilets and doing laundry, but I've decided that I'm OK with being the one to "keep the home fires" burning, so to speak. I do the bulk of the work at home, but I'm very clear about what I need from my husband to get it all done. This means that on a general basis, he's cooking dinner every night

while I catch up on work or exercise. When he asks me, “What needs to be done?” I tell him, it gets done, we move on with our lives, and we’re all a lot happier for it. The domestic work doesn’t necessarily have to be split 50/50 if that’s not realistic for you, but the key is finding a way to split it that is.

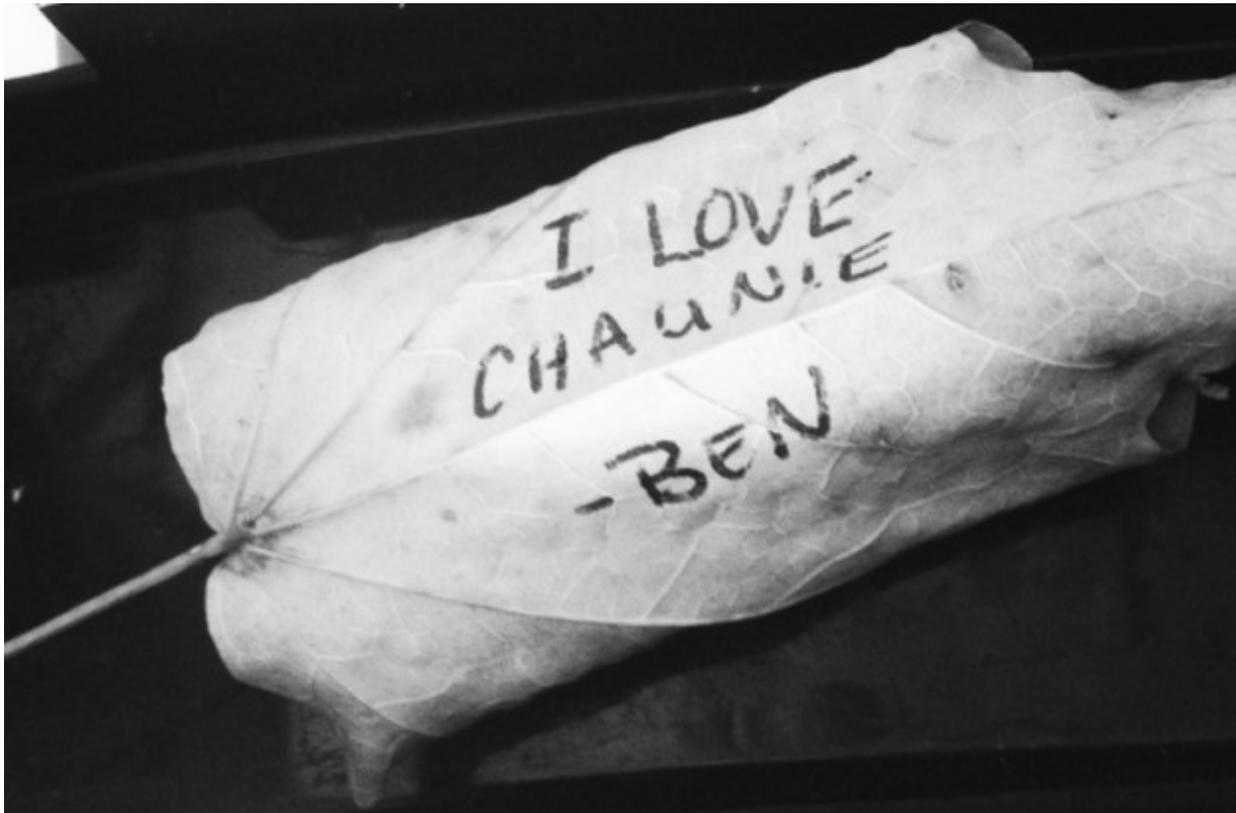


Image Source: Chaunie Brusie

6. Showing your commitment to each other in little ways

Now that I have made the transition to working full time from home as a writer, my days look a lot different than they used to as I juggle the domestic duties, the kids, and work. It’s become vastly important to me to make sure that my husband understands how hard it can be.

When he sits down and listens to me re-hash how the babysitter canceled at the last minute and how I had to write four articles and the toddler wouldn’t nap and the baby had the worst explosive poopy diaper of all time, he understands that what I’m really saying is, *tell me that this matters to you*. When he nods and commiserates with me on what a holy terror the 2-year-old is, he’s not doing it because my domestic play-by-play is the riveting account I think it is; he’s doing it to signal his investment in my day, my work, and thus, our relationship.

“It’s how we know we are both committed,” my husband explains with a laugh. “It’s not always flowers anymore, like it might have been in the early days. Leaning in today means that we’re there for each other and the ‘flowers’ in our relationship have changed from young spring daisies to the lunch deliveries after a night of no sleep and bringing home chocolate-covered pretzels that melt our hearts.”

You heard it first here, folks. It's not always flowers, but there's definitely chocolate.

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