Q. & A. with Lynn Toler, author of
*Making Marriage Work*

What do you think are the main factors that caused the huge increase in the divorce rate over the past four or five decades?

Let me count the ways. When society changes, its institutions are exposed to different pressures. Now that women are legally equal and more economically able, marriage is no longer a must but a choice. The sexual revolution, having allowed more of us access to sex without the requirement of marriage, has removed yet another social pressure that used to propel many down the aisle. Now that childbearing outside of marriage is also more socially acceptable, that’s one fewer reason to make the walk down the altar. Also we are not as dependent on each other as we were before. Gender roles are no longer so strictly defined. We can take care of our own needs without the necessity of a spouse. Add to that our having access to the entire world right in our living rooms through our keyboards, and we can get plenty of satisfaction in life outside the bounds of marriage.

What is the role of love in modern marriage?

In the beginning of any serious relationship, love is the spark that gets it started. *Stopping* there is where many people, especially younger people, make their mistake. That hot love, if we’re lucky, evolves into something else—a love that is more steady and consistent but not as exciting. (Lucky that it doesn’t die out altogether.) But you have to feed that fire regularly, and you can’t expect it to keep you warm without help.

What are the most common marital problems that you see again and again?

The intrusion of technology, the desire for immediate gratification, economic pressures, and the age-old problem—cheating.

What do you think has helped you maintain your own successful marriage?

We needed each other. He is strong where I am weak, and vice versa. We both had parents who had solid, yet not perfect, marriages. So we both had a script to follow for getting through tough times, and the belief that it can be done. And last, but not least, we believe in it. We don’t expect to be happy with each other all of the time, and when things did get bumpy, we got counseling.

What are the top three takeaways readers should glean from *Making Marriage Work*?

1. You have to be *consciously married*. That means you have to think about what you do and how you do it all of the way through. You have to treat marriage like a third party that needs to be fed and cared for in order for it to survive.
2. Marriage is work. And work is good for people.
3. You need to decide what *your* marriage is supposed to look like. What works for
one couple will doom another.

**Lynn Toler** graduated from Harvard University and got her law degree from the University of Pennsylvania. After a decade practicing law in Cleveland, she was elected judge of the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court in 1993. During her tenure, she was actively engaged in the community, creating innovative programs to help at-risk youth and coordinating resources and outreach to victims of domestic violence.

She became the host of *Divorce Court*, the longest-running television court program, in 2006. Her no-nonsense, straightforward advice and rulings have endeared her to legions of *Divorce Court*’s fans. She brings the same practical insights to *Making Marriage Work*, drawing on her own 22-year marriage to Eric Mumford. She is the author of *My Mother’s Rules* (2007), also published by Agate Bolden. Judge Toler has two sons and four stepsons, and frequently posts about her large, busy family on her [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com).