Six Lessons that Lead to Lifelong Love
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What I Didn’t Know about Romance and Nobody Else Seems to be Saying

I’m a controlling person by nature. It’s possible that Steamroller would have been a more appropriate middle name for me than Michelle. In the movie Broadcast News Joan Cusack’s character says to Holly Hunter’s character “It must be nice to know what’s best for everyone else all the time!” Holly Hunter crinkles up her face in agony and says, “No! It’s not! It’s awful!”

That was me—always thinking I knew what was best for everybody all the time.

Of course, I can’t actually control anyone beside myself—nobody can. But that hasn’t stopped me from trying. As a newlywed I really tried to improve my husband—for eight years. I told myself I was just helping, just trying to give him tips on how to be more romantic, tidier, more ambitious and healthier. But my attempts to “help” were received as criticisms, which in fact they were. The subtext of “Why don’t you tell your boss why you deserve a raise?” for instance, is “I don’t think you’re very capable at work.” Ouch!

I was so sure that I knew better that I just couldn’t stop some pretty harsh words from coming out of my mouth. The truth is, I believed so much in my rightness that I didn’t really think I should stop. I was just being honest and saying what I thought, I rationalized. But I had confused being honest with being rude and critical.

Not surprisingly, my husband became defensive and withdrawn. He resisted my “helpful” suggestions at every turn because he didn’t want to be controlled or insulted. There was a lot of tension at our house. Where there had once been so much joy in just being together it was now drudgery. I was resentful that he was so uncooperative that I was seriously considering divorce. I felt that it was his fault that I had become such a nag because he wouldn’t do even the smallest things that I asked him to do. I was completely frustrated and I thought I was miserable because I married the wrong man.

What I didn’t realize is that there is a way to behave so that you get what you want in a romantic relationship without being a nag. I wish I had known that before I met my husband, because it would have saved me a lot of heartache in my marriage and with dating before that. But at that time, I had no clue, nor did I have any relationship skills that would help me get what I wanted.
When I say there is a way you can get what you want, I mean that you can have both the romance part—like hand-holding, playfulness, satisfying sex and intimate conversations—and help with the more mundane things—like getting the trash to the curb, the baby’s crib moved to the garage and the den painted. It’s all tied together—either you’re going to have a romantic relationship where you feel cherished and get help or you’re going to have a painful relationship where you feel like your mother on her worst day and the trash piles up and the den never gets painted. Those are your options.

The good news is that if you’re a woman, it’s up to you to choose Door #1, which is lifelong romance or Door #2, which is where everyone suffers until you breakup or divorce. The choice is yours, and you can start choosing Door #1 today whether you’re single, seeing someone exclusively, engaged or married.

The reason you may not know about these romance skills already is that there’s a lot of misinformation out there. In fact, I see really terrible advice in really respected newspapers (I’m looking at you, Wall Street Journal) and blogs (yes, I mean you, Huffington Post) and other media all the time. I see quotes from so-called relationship experts who have done 30-years of research and they say things in books and articles that are just dead wrong and really unhelpful. I know because I tried those things and they got me wall-to-wall hostility, not the sweet romance I enjoy now.

No wonder I was confused when I was first married. No wonder the divorce rate is so high. The secret to a magical romance is not about phrasing your nagging more carefully or scaling down what you want or having his dinner on the table at 6:00 p.m. like a 1950s housewife. It’s not about scheduling time to communicate more or not sweating the small stuff and it won’t help to have a couple’s counselor straighten things out. (That might be the worst thing to do.)

The secret to lifelong romance comes down to having a few good habits. And if you don’t have them now, you can start adopting them today and then they’ll become your habits. We know this works because hundreds of thousands of women in 15 countries and 26 languages have already done it with great success. I get emails about how amazed they are and what a transformation it’s been for them.

Once I adopted these new habits, not only did my marriage become the romance I always dreamed of having, but the rest of my life—career, friendships, family interactions—improved in ways I hadn’t imagined, all because of the six principles in this booklet. Try them out for yourself and let me know how it goes by emailing laura@lauradoyle.org. I love to hear the stories of transformation and awakening that result when a woman puts these habits into practice.
Lesson #1: Practice Great Self-Care

The first step to having an amazing lifelong romance is to practice great self-care. That means doing at least three things a day for your own pleasure.

Sometime women at my workshops will ask me if doing three pleasurable things a week will be okay for them since they have kids and work full-time and feel they are too busy. But life is short and you don’t want to miss it. If you don’t have time to enjoy yourself every day you give yourself very little chance of ever having the kind of romance you’re wanting. You can’t be intimate when you’re stressed out, over-hungry or exhausted. Plus, having fun every day is not just critical for a satisfying romance—it’s part of a well-lived life.

Another reason self-care is so vital is that by treating ourselves well we teach other people how to treat us. Taking good care of ourselves reflects that we hold ourselves in high esteem. That inspires others to hold us in high-esteem as well.

If you’re single and wanting to attract the guy who’s right for you, self-care is the single best beauty-aid I know. Looking happy and relaxed is very attractive. Looking exhausted and frazzled is not. If you’re married or in an exclusive relationship, your man wants to feel successful at making you happy and he can’t do that unless you make yourself happy first. The solution in both cases is self-care. Make yourself deliriously happy starting today and you will be taking an indispensable step in the right direction for a lifelong romance. Plus you’ll be happier!

One great way to get started with this is to make a list of at least 20 things that you enjoy. Maybe your list would include taking a hot bath, or a nap or a walk. Maybe it would include making a quilt, a home-cooked meal or a new friend. You might like going to the water’s edge, to the movies or to an art exhibit. Simple things like talking to your sister on the phone or having lunch with a girlfriend count too. My list includes playing volleyball, watching comedy shows, hosting parties, dancing and listening to my favorite music. Yours might include playing with your pets or your kids or your collection. Write down as many things as you can think of on your list. This will become your reference page. Keep it close at hand or post it somewhere so you see it frequently.
The next step in ensuring you get great self-care is to plan which three things from your list you will do the following day. Put them into your calendar like you would a dentist appointment or a reminder to pick up the dry-cleaning. If you don’t schedule them and figure you will just work them in they’re not likely to happen, so make a plan.

I used to feel very guilty about my self-care when I first started practicing this regimen. I felt it was frivolous and that I should focus on being more productive and accomplished. It took me a while to overcome my discomfort but now I can’t imagine life any other way. I play volleyball three times a week. I host parties and take naps and meet my girlfriends for coffee or gab on the phone. I lollygag at the book store with a cup of hot tea. And I have this lifestyle because I decided to put my pleasure first. You might be thinking, “Well, that’s nice for you, but it’s not possible for me.” I used to feel the same way—I didn’t think it was possible for me either. But it was. I just had to make pleasure the priority and the rest of my time seemed to expand. The same things happen for the women I coach by phone or teach in my workshops and retreats.

One woman I worked with felt guilty when she took time for herself. She admitted that she liked knowing that she was needed, but also felt resentful that she had no time to herself. She decided to practice good self-care just the way she would make herself floss her teeth.

One evening she announced to her family that she was going to take a bath for thirty minutes. She told her family that if they needed anything from her they would have to wait. She got in the tub and tried to relax, but she was still expecting a knock on the door or some tiny hands underneath it. Instead, she noticed she was a little disappointed that nobody disturbed her because it proved that they could live without her for a little while. When she got out of the tub 40 minutes later, the kids were doing their homework, her husband was reading and nobody had died.

After a few weeks of practicing good self-care, this woman reported that she was more relaxed and less cranky, which made her feel better about herself. Whenever she started to feel that she was being selfish, she reminded herself that she was on the right track for being a better friend, coworker, mother and wife.

Practicing good self-care will also make you a happier person and help you create the kind of loving relationship you’ve always dreamed of.
Lesson #2: Relinquish Control of People You Can’t Control Anyway

I know this one sounds obvious, and you might think this is not a problem because you don’t do it anyway, and if that’s the case, that’s great. However, this control thing runs pretty deep for some people, including me, and just as fish are always the last to realize they’re in the ocean, some of us never even realize we’re trying to control someone else. I thought I was just making helpful suggestions so my husband could be tidier, make more money and lower his blood pressure. I had a blind spot that kept me from seeing I was actually trying to get him to act the way I thought he should act.

*The Wall Street Journal* recently ran a story about how nagging is more detrimental to marriage and causes more divorce than affairs do. At her core, a woman who repeatedly asks a man to do things even though he’s not very responsive or happy about it is a woman who thinks the way I think sometimes: “If I don’t control everything, things won’t get done the way they should. I will have to suffer or wait or pay more if I don’t control things.”

If you’ve ever corrected your man’s driving, told him what to wear or when to mow the lawn, then you were suffering from the illusion that you could control him, when of course you can’t. I know this sounds extreme—I thought so, too at first. But over time I came to see that knowing where I end and my husband begins and acting accordingly was absolutely critical to having a great romance. So the second lesson is to give up the illusion that you can control anyone except for yourself.

For single women the control manifests a little differently. Where a married woman justifies her control by telling herself she’s just being helpful, a single woman keeps herself lonely because nobody meets her standards. She has a mental checklist as long as my arm. He has to have an education, a certain kind of profession, a full head of hair. He has to be a certain height, a certain age, make a certain amount of money. She is looking for an instant attraction before she accepts a single date because she doesn’t want to risk even one evening if she can’t predict the outcome. Of course, now she and her checklist are staying at home on Saturday night because no mere mortal man can measure up.

Another way a single woman may try to stay in control is by trying to keep men from approaching her so she won’t have to turn them down. Of course she wants the right guy to approach, but there are so many wrong guys...
approaching that she decides to close up shop. She goes out into the world with a body language and energy that says “don’t approach” because it feels safer than having to reject someone, which is always uncomfortable.

All control is based in fear. If you’re not afraid, you don’t need to try to control what someone says on the phone or what he eats for lunch or how much money he spends. If you’re not afraid you’ll get your heart broken, you don’t have to make a checklist that eliminates everyone but Brad Pitt.

But let’s say you’re in the habit of trying to control other people. How do you stop? You make a decision to stop, just the way you would decide to stop at a red light when you’re driving to get along with other cars in traffic. You may not do it perfectly, but most of the time you stay out of trouble by making that decision. For a single woman, relinquishing control means throwing out that checklist of the perfect man and staying open to the possibility that the right guy may not be what you imagined, but will certainly be what delights you. For a wife, it means minding your own business when your husband needs a haircut, has a candy bar for lunch or should be wearing his safety goggles.

If that sounds hard, I can tell you it really is at first. It requires courage to feel that fear and not act on it. Ambrose Redmoon said “Courage is not the absence of fear but the decision that something else is more important.” And deciding that having an intimate, passionate, tender relationship is more important than indulging your fear is a courageous decision.
Lesson #3: Receive Gifts, Compliments and Help Graciously

In Eastern philosophy, the concepts of feminine and masculine are called yin and yang.

A comparative religions student once described these concepts to me this way: Every object is comprised of both yin (feminine) and yang (masculine). The part of a coffee cup that can hold coffee is the yin, or the feminine. The structure of the mug is the masculine. The yin is also the most important part of the cup because it is the part that can receive the coffee, which gives the yang purpose. Without the yin, the coffee cup couldn't hold coffee and then there wouldn't be any point.

Just as with a coffee cup, part of being feminine is receiving. That means that when your husband or a romantic prospect makes an effort to do or say something nice, you accept it graciously. If you think you're having a bad hair day and someone says “Your hair looks great,” you say, “Thank you!” instead of “Actually, I haven't washed it!!”

When your guy gets you a present that isn’t quite what you had in mind, you can receive it by saying, “You are so thoughtful. Thank you!”

If he says, “I’ll do the dishes,” and you suspect he’s going to put plates in the dishwasher with big hunks of food on them you say, “Thank you,” not, “I’ll just do it myself.”

If you reject a gift, you also reject the giver and the emotional connection you could have had with him.

You can always find something truthful but polite to say when a friend gets you something. Extend the same courtesy to your guy. You might say, “What a pretty color,” or “I’ve never seen anything like it—thanks!” Do this because you want to nurture the relationship and show that you’re open to being treated and showered with gifts. The gifts, help or compliments won’t all be exactly what you would have picked out for yourself. But for that, you can go to the store.

I had one woman ask if she was supposed to pretend that she liked something that her boyfriend got her when she didn't like it. “That’s dishonest!” she complained. Maybe. But maybe bringing manners back into the relationship would help to preserve the intimacy, and just maybe that’s more important. Only you know what fits for you. I know for me
there was a point where I was critical of everything my husband picked out for me if it wasn’t what I would have picked out that he stopped buying me anything. I really should have just saved us both a lot of time and married myself.

If you’re single, receiving graciously also means that you accept the offers for dates that come to you very liberally. Remember that you don’t have to spend the rest of your life with your date—just a few hours. You don’t have much to lose but you will make progress toward meeting the man who’s right for you by getting out there and practicing receiving graciously. If he’s offered to take you out, implicit in his offer is his desire to buy you dinner or coffee or a movie ticket. Receive that by simply saying, “Thank you.” No need to offer to pay—that is rejecting his implicit offer.

Make a point of graciously receiving everything you’re offered, whether it’s a stranger holding the door for you, a clerk at the grocery store offering to help you out to the car or a friend who offers to pay for lunch. Accept other people’s thoughtfulness good-naturedly and recognize that receiving is the ultimate act of giving up control.

Even if you’re afraid you’ll owe a debt to someone (you won’t—by definition, gifts are free), receive his or her gift with open arms and gratitude. Respond to compliments by saying thank you and nothing more, even if you don’t believe the compliment. Let others lighten your load by helping you move the chairs or carry the boxes.

Make “receive, receive, receive” your mantra.
Lesson #4: Respect Men—Especially Your Man

I know it’s fun to joke about how the difference between men and savings bonds is that bonds mature, but the problem is that we start to believe what we hear ourselves laughing about. This is particularly self-destructive for single women because you end up convincing yourself that men are an inconsiderate bunch of slobs or cheaters and you’re not missing out on anything by not having one of your own.

But that doesn’t make you long for a romance any less. It just gives you justification for rolling your eyes at them, which as it turns out, doesn’t help with attracting them—quite the opposite.

Male-bashing is disrespectful. And the number one thing a man wants from the woman he loves is respect.

He wants your respect more than your help, his favorite dinner, a new car or even sex (although he likely wants that too). Your husband, boyfriend or first-date wants to know that you will honor the choices he makes for his life whether you agree with him or not. Respect means that you don’t dismiss, criticize, contradict or try to teach him anything. It particularly means you don’t make fun of him for doing things the way a guy does things, which is often completely different from the way a woman does things.

There’s some confusion about the word respect because people think of it as something you have to give to teachers or a boss. But respect simply means that even if you didn’t agree you would honor a man’s decisions for his life. A respectful woman can listen to a man talk without offering suggestions or helpful tips. Most of all, a woman who respects her man will apologize when she’s disrespectful, just the way she would apologize for being cranky or showing up late.

At my workshops and retreats I get a lot of head nodding about this. Women say that they understand that respect is important, and one will say that she does respect her boyfriend—except for the way he drives and the way he dresses. Other than that, respect is no problem. Or a single woman will say she respects men, but she wishes she could find one who isn’t such a pig.
It seems we women sometimes have a blind spot about how disrespectful we are. We think we’re just being honest, but in reality we’re broadcasting some pretty harsh criticism for the very person we want to have intimacy and romance with.

We all have our moments when we wonder why men can’t be more communicative or tell us how they’re feeling, for instance. But when we complain about the way men communicate, what we’re really saying is, “Why can’t men be more like women?”

Men can’t ever be good women, and for this we can be glad. They come from a different culture where talking about feelings is generally not all that comfortable. Neither is talking as much as women talk. Author Deborah Tannen writes that “saying that men talk about baseball to avoid talking about their feelings is like saying that women talk about feelings to avoid talking about baseball.” Men have traits that we lack and lack traits that we have. Accepting that and celebrating it is the first step toward truly being respectful, which is critical for intimacy.

I used to think my husband was immature because when I wanted to be very serious and worry about our future, he would try to make me laugh. From my point of view, that was not very adult. But another point of view is to recognize that he has a way of reminding me to have fun and not be so heavy. My husband knows that life is light, which is a wonderful thing. Today I really appreciate that my husband makes me laugh a lot. I respect that about him.

Respect also means that you expect the best outcome—not the worst. It means understanding the power of what I call “spouse-fulfilling prophecies.” If he knows that you think he’s going to screw up, chances are good that he will. If he looks in your eyes and sees that you expect him to succeed, chances are good that he will. If you roll your eyes when he says something, you were just disrespectful, which means you owe him an apology—if you want to keep your side of the street clean.

And keeping your side of the street clean is the only way to create the emotional safety where intimacy and romance will thrive.
Lesson #5: Express Gratitude

Another one of the keys to having a magical, lifelong romance is expressing gratitude. I suggest three gratitudes a day for your guy or for men in general.

I remember Gina, who was taking my workshop, thought this practice sounded ridiculous. "Why should I thank my husband for taking out the trash? That's his job and nobody's thanking me for everything I do around the house and taking care of the baby." Even so, Gina agreed to try the exercise of giving her husband three gratitudes a day even though she didn't think it was fair. Gina thanked her husband for watching the baby while she went to yoga, for making her coffee in the morning and for running to the store when they were out of milk. Three days into this experiment her husband sat down at dinner and said, "You've really shown me that we need to appreciate each other more, so I wanted to thank you for making dinner." Gina softened, smiled and said, "You're welcome!" And she meant it.

A very common complaint that I hear from men is that they don't get credit for what they do. One man thought he was being helpful when he offered to put the baby to bed so his wife could relax. But instead of thanking him, his wife complained that he had put the pajamas on backward. That killed the intimacy between them that evening.

I remember one woman telling me that she couldn't bear to stay married to her husband any longer because he was so awful and inconsiderate. When I asked her why she didn't leave, she said it was because she wanted to be a stay-at-home mom for her two small boys. When I suggested that she offer her husband three gratitudes a day, she said she couldn't think of a single thing to thank him for. "What about working hard to support the family so you can stay home with your sons?" She scrunched up her face and said, "He only does that because he has to!" At that point, I could see why her husband wasn't putting a whole lot of effort into trying to please this woman.

When you can't please someone, it's human nature to get discouraged and give up. If, on the other hand, you do someone a small favor and they act like you really did them a big favor, you feel more inclined to go out of your way for that person again in the future.

I remember being afraid to thank my husband for doing things around the house because I thought that if I did, he would consider those things optional and not do them anymore. I don't know where I got that idea, but I was
completely wrong. Today we have quite a culture of gratitude at the Doyle house. I'm constantly thanking him for doing the dishes, for replacing the light bulb in the bathroom, for taking out the trash, for working hard at his business and more. He is constantly thinking of things to do that will make me happy. The more grateful I am, the more inspired he seems to be.

For single women, gratitude is a wonderful way to flirt with men. One woman approached the guy who was running the audio-visual equipment at a conference to thank him for putting together such a slick presentation. He said it was nothing and proceeded to flirt with her. He asked her if she was going to be there the next day. Why not? Gratitude is attractive.

Gratitude also has magical powers. It turns an ordinary meal into a feast, and an ordinary man into your hero, and an average relationship into a lifelong romance.
Lesson #6: Strive to be Vulnerable

Author Madeline L’Engle says, “When we were children we used to think that when we were grown up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability.” That’s my experience too, that you can’t escape it—especially in an intimate relationship. Intimacy and vulnerability are directly connected in that you can only be intimate with someone to the degree that you are vulnerable. And trying to be intimate without being vulnerable is like trying to swim without water.

If what you want is intimacy, then you must reveal your soft underbelly—the place where you’re the most tender and could be the most easily hurt. This is the part of you that’s unguarded and decides to trust even when you’re not feeling so brave.

Vulnerability is not the same as weakness—it actually takes much more strength and courage to risk emotionally than it does to stay defended. Sometimes we don’t even know we’re defended—we just know that it would feel uncomfortable to admit that we don’t know what someone is talking about, or to say we’re lonely. That’s because it would make us vulnerable.

If I tell you about the time I left the house with an errant sock stuck inside the leg of my slacks and how they came out while I was talking to a reporter, for instance, this does not make me look as awesome and clever as I would like you to think I am. But it did give the reporter a chuckle, and created a bond because she had done the same thing.

If I tell you about the time I told my husband not to order a coke at dinner because it would save money and be healthier if he drank water, that’s just embarrassing. That is not improving my coolness factor at all, I’m pretty sure.

Just admitting those things makes me feel pretty exposed. You could certainly make fun of me. But those stories also reveal my humanity, which you can probably identify with. And I know that most people consider that a kind of sacred trust. They don’t want to let you down by saying something cruel when you’re being vulnerable.

When you think about the most embarrassing things you’ve done you probably hope that nobody ever finds out about them, but the people who know all about you and love you anyway are probably the people who mean the most. That's
because those embarrassing, tender or awkward moments in your life are proof positive that you’re human and you’re real, which is what we connect with.

Vulnerability means admitting you’re hurt instead of defending yourself. It means that instead of saying, “you hurt my feelings,” you simply say, “Ouch!” It means instead of saying, “You’re never home,” you say, “I miss you.” Instead of bounding up two flights of stairs at the end of a date, you stand still long enough to be kissed, even though you’re nervous. It means acknowledging that you can’t always do it all and that sometimes you need help and support. It means asking for advice when you’re not sure what to do.

For Jennifer, it meant whispering in her estranged husband’s ear at the movies: “I miss having you in my bed.” He returned to their bedroom that same night.

For Alison, it meant breaking the news to her boyfriend that she had herpes without trying to explain or defend, even though she was afraid he would reject her. Instead he hugged her and said, “You will have to try harder than that if you want to get rid of me.”

If what you want is intimacy, you must be vulnerable. It feels risky, and it is.

Sometimes I suggest to a coaching client that she deliver a message to her man about how she feels and she’ll say, “I don’t want to say that—it sounds so—awkward.”

What she means is, “I don’t want to be vulnerable.”

You’ll know when you’re being vulnerable because part of you will want to resist, maybe to hold back your tears, or pretend you weren’t disappointed or that you don’t need help. Memorize that feeling and bravely walk into it as much as you can because that’s where the magic is. Vulnerability is not only attractive, it’s where you get that incredible, indescribable feeling of being loved just the way you are by someone who knows you well. There’s nothing quite like it on earth, and it really is worth risking everything to have it.
How to Adopt The Habits That Lead to Lifelong Love

Good relationships are the product of good relationship skills—not luck or fate. Like anything else, you can practice and learn these skills. Hundreds of thousands of women in 26 countries and 15 languages have already used the principles of intimacy to renew and transform their love lives over the last decade, so we know this works.

If you’re wondering where to begin with getting these skills and habits, you can start by reading *The Surrendered Wife: A Practical Guide to Intimacy, Passion and Peace with a Man* or *The Surrendered Single: How to Attract and Marry the Man Who’s Right for You*.

You might also consider getting some mentoring while you are learning to create new behaviors. One economical way to do that is by joining a Self-Care Circle. Self-Care Circles are small groups of women who meet twice a month on the phone with a Certified Intimacy Coach for individual support, training and inspiration. If you’re not satisfied with your current relationship or you’re single and wishing you’d meet the right guy, Self-Care Circles will get you from where you are now to where you want to be in a hurry. Or for more privacy, you might want individual coaching.

The experience of learning and practicing the principles of intimacy is so moving and powerful for some women that they want to make it their career. There’s a growing need for coaches who are both trained in these principles and living them. If you’d like to be a Certified Intimacy Coach who shows women how to have a satisfying, magical relationship, you may be good fit for Intimacy Coach Training. You can read about the program outline and requirements here.

My mission is to provide every woman who wants a great relationship with the mentoring and skills training she needs. If there’s anything I can do to help you create the relationship you deserve, where you’re cherished, protected, desired and adored every day for life, or if you’d like to share your success story (I read them all), write me at laura@lauradoyle.org.

Until we talk again, take good care of you.