

# THE American Dream

BY PAMELA HAMMONDS



Our ancestors defined The American Dream quite simply: religious freedom, job opportunities, social order and a democratic government. In the same spirit of our forefathers' Declaration of Independence—where men are created equal and life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are indisputable rights—we embrace The American Dream today and modify it to fit our own ideals.

The term was first coined by Pulitzer Prize-winning author James Truslow Adams in 1931. He wrote that "The American Dream

is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement." To Adams, it mattered not from where you were born or the color of your skin and dreams weren't measured by high salaries and pricey cars. He believed that true freedom came to those who were "able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable."

So, what is your American Dream? Consider how you define your dream marriage. Your dream family. Your dream career. »



# THE AMERICAN DREAM Marriage

MANY YEARS AGO I CROSSED PATHS WITH A YOUNG NEWLY-MARRIED WOMAN WHO EXPRESSED TO ME HER FIVE YEAR MARRIAGE PLAN. Essentially, if she was still 'happy' in her marriage at the five-year mark, she'd stay; if not, she was gone. I never saw this woman after that day, but I can't help but assume she's not still married. Her American Dream Marriage had been founded on pretty shaky grounds: Whether or not she was happy, and her definition of it, was her marriage's litmus test.

One must assume that most people embrace the 'for better or worse' vow they take on their wedding day. Surely we expect to be happy, but to not expect moments of sorrow, disappointment, frustration and even anger is immature at best.

So how do you build The American Dream Marriage? Start with the basics: To love, honor and forgive. Establish shared goals and dreams such as home ownership, children or financial security. Commit to open communication and mutual respect. Make your marriage a priority, not an afterthought. Make church a part of your lives.

Glenn T. Stanton, director for family formation studies at Focus on the Family, revealed that couples who regularly attend church divorce at a rate 35 percent lower than secular couples. In his book *Why Marriage Matters*, he stated that "Religious commitment, rather than mere religious affiliation, contributes to greater levels of marital success."

Today's marriage partners encounter obstacles not previously faced by other generations. Not only must they balance demands, such as work and children, but also factor in the distractions of our high-tech society. From texting to emails, Facebook to Twitter, the potential for losing your partner's attention grows each day.

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Dr. Ken McGill, of Mind Matters Clinic of Texas in Plano, works with his clients to ensure couples use effective communication tools. "I

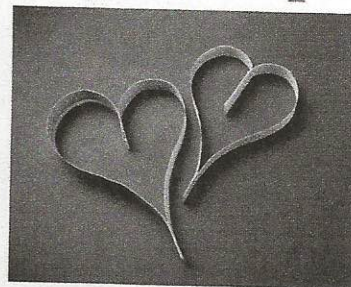


counsel people from a perspective of looking at seven core parts of themselves: spiritual, cognitive, emotional, physical/biological, sexual, social and environmental," he said. "If we pay attention to these seven areas and not only give our attention (to our spouse) but respect, accept, honor, esteem, cherish, prize and remain devoted to them, the rest will likely fall into place."

Dr. McGill stated that through the course of life, when challenges happen—infidelity, loss, children, moves, illness, financial problems—the core needs are still there as other needs change. To mold these components into the definition of your American Dream Marriage, acknowledge that the "primary relationship must not be ignored so you can successfully make it through the various stages of your lives together."

Achieving The American Dream Marriage takes considerable work from both the husband and the wife, but its rewards will last—if children are involved—for generations to come. »

## Expert Tips



**PARTNERS IN THE AMERICAN DREAM MARRIAGE CAN BENEFIT FROM A COMMUNICATION COVENANT DR. MCGILL HAS DESIGNED. WITH 21 CONDITIONS TO KEEP IN MIND, HERE ARE A FEW TO CONSIDER:**

- I will not exaggerate, be glib or intolerant, attack you or use sarcasm during the course of a disagreement. I promise I will not put labels on you. (*Proverbs 15:1*)
- I will consider the consequences of what I say before I say it. (*Proverbs 15:28*)
- I will try not to interrupt you when you are speaking. But if I do, I will ask you to continue.
- I will not bring up your past failures in the course of a disagreement. I will remind myself that a past failure has been discussed and forgiven and that bringing up a failure cripples you from growing and developing. True forgiveness means the failure will not be brought up again. (*Ephesians 4:32*)
- I agree to be willing to move out of hurt or anger once the issues have been resolved (to "make up"), instead of remaining distant or emotionally unavailable. (*Ephesians 4:31*)
- I will regularly express words of appreciation, compliments and respect for you, my spouse. (*Ephesians 4:29*)