

# Sisters woman helps people build 'rock solid' marriages

**Jim Cornelius**  
Editor in Chief

Our marriages are perhaps the most important relationships in our lives — yet we often neglect them and suddenly find that we are in trouble.

Norene Gonsiewski of Sisters has, in partnership with Tom Higdon, produced "Rock Solid Relationship: Seven Keys to Restore Your Connection & Make Your Love Last."

The book was devised as a handbook to help people seeking counseling through Gonsiewski and Higdon's practice to get a jump-start on the work. However, Gonsiewski notes, the book can on its own benefit anyone seeking to restore a frayed connection with their partner — or anyone who wants to ensure that the connection doesn't become frayed in the first place.

Gonsiewski has been working with couples since 1980, and she's seen a common theme play out over and over again:

"People start a romantic relationship and then they run into inevitable problems, in part because they stop taking care of their relationship," Gonsiewski said.

Instead of recognizing this, couples often jump to a dire conclusion.

"Couples tend to think their problems are unique," Gonsiewski said. "What couples think is, 'I married the wrong person.'"

That belief is fed by a false notion that is signaled across society that if we are with the right person, there won't be conflict. Early infatuation — which carries a powerful hormonal kick — tends to paper over differences. But infatuation cannot last.

"Eighteen months is a long run for infatuation," Gonsiewski notes.

When infatuation fades and differences in outlook, values, and the abrasions of everyday life start to make themselves felt, many couples just don't know how to deal with it.

"They don't know *how* to have conflict," Gonsiewski said.

There's an almost clockwork pattern to fractures in marriages.

"There are two bumps in the divorce rate," Gonsiewski said. "The first is at five years."

That's the point at which couples start to feel that they just can't deal with constant conflict anymore. But much of that conflict may be down

to the couple's inability to communicate effectively.

"The book helps because it does teach you how to communicate," Gonsiewski said.

Good communication in a marriage requires respect and validation of the other's point of view.

Communication at this fraught stage in a marriage often slides into debate and from there into argument — with neither party really hearing the other.

"Listen to understand, not to respond," Gonsiewski advises. "That's the number-one culprit."

It's also important for couples to talk about what they need from their relationship — not to simply complain to and about their partner.

"We don't talk about the need; we talk about the complaint," Gonsiewski said.

Good communication comes when both parties begin "believing that there is a win-win solution."

The second bump in the divorce rate comes much later — often when kids are raised and couples find they are

almost strangers to each other.

A relationship may not be filled with conflict — but the connection may be fading away.

The question for such couples is "how to get back to having your relationship be priority," Gonsiewski said.

One key to reestablishing the connection — that wistfully-remembered fun that a couple used to have — is "returning to love as a verb," Gonsiewski says.

"You have to *do* things. Love is decision followed by a thousand acts of love."

Sex is a critical component. "We try to help people understand the importance of sex," Gonsiewski said.

It's not just about gratification; sex hormones bond

people to each other.

Gonsiewski recognizes that physical changes and the stresses of everyday life can impact desire. She and Higdon urge couples to focus on "willingness" rather than awaiting "desire."

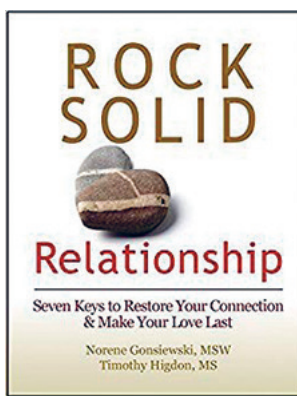
"You need to be willing to give it 10 minutes and see where it goes," Gonsiewski said.

They urge couples to practice "good sexual habits": Maintain a date night; watch a sunset together; go out to see some live music...

Individual outlook is also of critical importance, Gonsiewski believes.

"Negativity kills love and you've gotta cut it out," she said.

For more information or to order "Rock Solid Relationship," visit <https://rocksolidrelationshiphelp.com/book-rock-solid-relationship/>.



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