



EPISODE 122: PRACTICING OPENHEARTEDNESS IN YOUR MARRIAGE WITH KIRSTEN PARKER

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/122](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/122)

Maggie Reyes:

Hello everyone. Welcome back. Today is going to be an amazing episode. I know I say that at the beginning of every episode, but I get really excited every episode. So I think today's going to be amazing.

We have a returning guest this week. Her name is Kirsten Parker. She is phenomenal. She's going to introduce herself in just a moment. She just went through The Marriage MBA and had previously done an episode we did just about The Makeover.

So we will link to that in the show notes because I think it's so fascinating to hear about and see the changes she made with the self-study program and then the changes that she made in The Marriage MBA and just her take and her approach to things I always find so refreshing and so amazing. So thank you for coming back. Welcome to the show.

Kirsten Parker:

Oh my gosh. Thanks for having me.

Maggie Reyes:

And before we get started, tell people a little bit about what you do now. And I always love hearing about what you used to do because I think your life is fascinating.

Kirsten Parker:

Oh my gosh.





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Maggie Reyes:

Tell us a little bit about the work you did before you became a Coach.

Kirsten Parker:

Okay. I equally think your life is fascinating. I tell my Coach, my Coaching group that I run, about you all the time and your HR story and your cruise lines, every story you've told.

Maggie Reyes:

I love it.

Kirsten Parker:

Yeah. Kirsten, I'm a Decision Coach for overthinkers. I used to be a theater stage manager. So for over 10 years, I should do the math at some point, but it rarely matters, but I did my bachelor's in theater.

I worked professionally for a couple years, stage managing. I went to Yale for three years, got a master's degree in a program that takes four people a year in this wacky job that I never had any intention in doing forever. Super interesting life choice.

Maggie Reyes:

What was your masters in? The stage management was your masters at Yale?

Kirsten Parker:

So weird.





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Maggie Reyes:

Okay. Listen, I went to Miami-Dade Community College. So when you come over, by the way, I love Miami-Dade, it's the best community college in the country. It's amazing. Barack Obama was my commencement speaker. I'm all about it. But when you say I went to Yale, we just need to pause and just to delight.

Kirsten Parker:

Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:

And that. Because that's huge.

Kirsten Parker:

It was a big deal. Lupita was in the class below me.

Maggie Reyes:

Lupita, tell us.

Kirsten Parker:

Say it again.

Maggie Reyes:

Tell us. Lupita, give us the last name for everybody listening.





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Kirsten Parker:
Oh, Lupita Luongo.

Maggie Reyes:
We need to pause.

Kirsten Parker:
I think the world only knows her as Lupita, but I never did a show with her. All my friends are famous. They're all very successful. It's really great. And I just think it's so funny because I never... My thesis that I wrote, I spent an entire year writing, was just interviewing 25 people who quit stage management. I was like, "What do you do when you quit? Because I don't want to do this." It was so weird. It was such a weird life choice.

Maggie Reyes:
So fascinating. But stage management is the ultimate, you're making decisions every day.

Kirsten Parker:
100%.

Maggie Reyes:
And there's so many jobs like that. I used to think this, okay, we're going to go on a tangent then we'll come back.





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Kirsten Parker:
I'm here for it.

Maggie Reyes:

But I think everything is related to your marriage and your thought process and how you run your life and how you run your home life. I used to think about this in HR where the higher you get in a company, what are you really being paid for?

Because the lower, quote unquote, lower positions of the company, the more direct tasks, you're getting paid to do a task. So when I was a receptionist, which I was when I was 21, I was paid to answer the phone. I was paid to do a task.

But higher and higher and higher, what are you paid for? And I would ask myself these questions because I was a nerd when I was in HR too. And I'd be like, Oh, you're getting paid for your decision making paradigm. Not even your decisions but the way you make them.

So if you're like a director, a VP, a manager, a CEO, whatever role you have, you're getting paid for how you make decisions essentially. I feel like stage manager is, you're making all these decisions and on behalf of the whole production about what's going to work, what's not going to work, how it's going to work, how you have to change it. This didn't work last night, we're going to tweak it tomorrow night. It's just a great example of a job where your whole job is decisions.

Kirsten Parker:

100%. And I felt like I had that very much in common with everyone in your group, even though





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no one did the same thing because my whole life, basically, my whole professional life was I am in charge. And I'm working with other people who are in charge of different things, but there's only one stage manager.

Even if you're on a team, there's a hierarchy. Everyone has their own responsibilities. There's only one stage manager. It's so fascinating to see how that plays into, even in the marriage when I'm like, I'm used to scheduling things, looking at what is the most efficient way that this makes sense. Let me scan for all the ways that nothing makes sense right now and point them out because obviously everyone wants to know.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. I think stage manager is such an interesting thing to think about when it comes to your marriage. Because this is the dynamic that's coming to my mind, which is when you're in a position in a company, there's external leadership or you have the position, you are the vice president of the department.

And then there's the project manager, for example, who has no, quote unquote, official authority but isn't charge of getting things done and on time. And how do you cultivate getting things done in a patriarchal culture, in the culture that we're in, when you don't have the external authority, you don't sign their evaluations, you don't give feedback. And stage managing, you're not the director, you're not the producer. You're like the project manager of the project that is the production.

Kirsten Parker:





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Yes. That is so accurate.

Maggie Reyes:

And so, your authority has to be internal. Your authority has to come from buy-in, from this was what makes sense for the production and you get people to buy into that. And so if we take that to our marriages, we don't want authority above our partners.

We want to be equal collaborators with our partners. So if we feel like we're the director or the producer, what we say goes, this is the way we do it. We want to step out of that role and step into a stage manager role where it's like, hey, I know a bunch of things need to happen and this is what sort of makes sense for our ourselves or our family or however we want to describe it.

And it's like the buy-in or the authority comes from the collaboration. That's it. The authority comes from the collaboration, not from an external decider of something.

Kirsten Parker:

Oh my God. That's so brilliant. And I'm going to make all of my stage manager friends, especially, I have a lot of friends who teach stage management now, I'm going to make them all listen to the first 10 minutes of this episode.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes. Hi friends.

Kirsten Parker:

And I said I'm used to being in charge, but you're right, it's not... The best stage manager... And





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for people who don't know what a stage manager is, it's the person in theater who, in a live theater production, who runs every rehearsal.

So the only people who come to rehearsals are performers and the director team and then whoever's also on the creative team who come first. But the logistics of that, setting it up, scheduling it, coordinating who's called when, how much do we get done, how fast do we go, when do we take breaks, what rules are we following?

And then for the production, they run tech, which is when all of the people go to the theater and lights and there's sound and there's costumes and there's food and there's pyrotechnics. You're the person coordinating all of those departments and keeping everything on schedule and making sure everyone's personalities are appropriately managed and making sure the show opens.

But the best stage managers are the best collaborators. 100%. Because you can be a brilliant problem solver. You can be a brilliant technical show caller, but if you don't know how to do that buy-in, get that buy-in and actually collaborate with people.

Because you can't have an iron fist. You really are not in charge to that extent. So that's such a brilliant point. And I think that you're absolutely right because we, control enthusiasts, have a misunderstanding that we do want to be able to be in charge of our relationships. But we don't.

Maggie Reyes:
Yeah.





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Kirsten Parker:
It's not true.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. Control is such an illusion. If there's one thing I took out of being in the pandemic, I was like, everything was always this way, it was just we had all these processes that hid things and now nothing is hidden.

So it's like, oh, there's a supply chain issue. Or oh, everybody is shutting down or whatever the different things we've gone through in the pandemic. We were one microscopic cellular thing away from a complete life change. And this will always be the case on earth.

Control is such a illusion. And yet we have to find a way to relate to it in a way where there are some things we can control, what are those things? And there are some things we need to really profoundly let go of and what are those things? And how we navigate that is just the adventure of life.

Kirsten Parker:

The adventure of life. But I think that it totally makes sense to me looking back that I became a decision Coach. Because you're right, it is nothing but decision making in that job. But I think that what I share in common with a lot of your type A women that you work with is I feel competent, super duper competent.

I used to feel competent in one area. Very strikingly. I was like, I know how to make decisions





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here. I know the right ones. I know how to trust them. I don't live in second guessing in my job. And professional successful type A women don't. You can't.

But then somehow there's a disconnect between that skill translating to everywhere else in your life. And that's what I needed to get good at. And that's what I help people with. How do you trust your decisions? How do you not live your life in overthinking?

How do you not angst, not have an angsty experience of every decision such that your life doesn't feel nice every day? And so that you can actually make those decisions that you want to move your life forward with. And so, it makes sense. I'm glad we had this conversation.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah, me too. I love it.

Kirsten Parker:

It's super useful.

Maggie Reyes:

I love it. So you made some notes and I always like to just hear what you want to share. Anything you want to share is welcome. So tell us a little bit about whatever's on your mind, Kirsten.

Kirsten Parker:

Okay, well I was like, what do people need to hear about? Because the whole thing is riding on this podcast obviously. No, I was just like, how do I condense my thoughts so that I don't take





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up nine hours of Maggie's time because I'm obsessed with her.

But first, it was really helpful for me to reflect on why I joined. Because I think I am a lifelong subscriber of Coaching now. It's just who I am. And I will always be investing in Coaching because it is my way of life. And it's not everyone's. There's always a first time you invest in Coaching.

Or there's always a first time you invest in Coaching that's not Executive Coaching or Business Coaching. And that's what your program is. It's a deviation. And it was really simple in my mind and I was like, why did I join this? It was because I wanted a great marriage and I'm not an expert in how to do that. And I know from personal experience how well it works to wait for things to happen on their own, which is not-

Maggie Reyes:

Let's just wait for things to happen on their own.

Kirsten Parker:

I would never, ever wait for my business to just get as good as I want it to be and be thriving, it would never happen. And I think this is such a really good point you make in, are we still calling it The Makeover?

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.





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Kirsten Parker:

The Marriage Makeover. Because on day five you talk about investing in your marriage and you just make it really plain and simple. Hey, we are investing in things that we say are important all over our lives. But there's this weird thing that's happening where we're just all getting married and hoping that we become experts in it instantly, even though none of us have ever done that before. Been experts in marriage.

Maggie Reyes:

Right. And I'm a child of divorce, so I didn't grow up with that. I didn't really have personal models of people that I personally knew that had the kind of marriage that I would want. Of course I knew people who were married, but the structure of the relationship, obviously, I'm very collaborative and I would say, I talk about sexy besties and the different things.

I feel that way about my husband and we're very much sexy besties. But that didn't exist back then. So there were all these kinds of relationships where I was like, well, that may work for them, but I wouldn't think that's what I would want. I had to become an expert for myself first. Wait, what is this?

And then I added just, oh, I think this is something people should know. Because I was like, I'm an intelligent, educated person and I had no idea how to do this. And when I realized that, I was like, oh, maybe we should talk more about what it means to have a healthy, thriving relationship just as a society.

Kirsten Parker:





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Yeah. That's not based on following the rules correctly. That's based from thinking for yourself, what do I want? And really giving yourself space to be honest with that answer. And it was so great. It was so great. Just join, if you're listening to this, just join.

But it was so amazing to have time for my marriage on my calendar every week. It's the same experiences when I became, I used to fantasize about being a person who had private Pilates sessions because oh, I just thought that was so fancy and luxurious and only certain people get to do that. And now I'm that person. And I'm like, oh yeah, this is a fabulous way to live.

But it's that same effect that having that time on my calendar, for me, that proves to myself, you're making this important. And it's that same thing for the marriage. Our weekly meeting on my calendar was time for my marriage on my calendar every week.

And just that alone changes the way that you, I think, relate to your relationship. Because it's not something that you're running in the background that you're kind of hoping changes on its own. And that's not to shame anyone who's doing that. We all do this, we all do that.

But I just think that the impact was so strong of knowing, oh, I'm in it. I'm in it. And this is just non-negotiable important every single week. And I mean, I'm comparing it to a health goal or not a health goal, a health commitment. It's like, yeah, we're just going to make this non-negotiable important and keep practicing, keep building the muscles of everything from the beginning.

Maggie Reyes:





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And I think that weekly call, what I remember when I was really designing the program, I thought, we're going to talk about some heavy stuff, which we do. But how could I as the energetic leader of this space, now I think about it differently, back then, I really did think about it as the energetic leader.

Now I'm like, as we're all collaborating and creating this space together. I think about it much more as a collaboration. But I thought, how could this be the most fun you have all week where you actually look forward to your Marriage Coaching call? If I was going to have that as the goal.

And I think that it's this one space where if you're struggling in your relationship, you don't have to struggle in the group. In the group, it's this one place where you can let your hair down and be with whatever's happening and everybody's on your side.

And everybody, I compare it to Toastmasters, I did Toastmasters for a year when I first left corporate, and if you've ever been to a Toastmasters meeting, it's like, people give you feedback and they tell you if you're saying um 15 times, they will tell you. Which I have, I've been told.

And it's like everybody in that room is on your side and wants to see you succeed. And I feel that way about the energy that we have in the group. It's this one place where you could be, I had a crappy day and then I meant to not start a fight, but I started it anyway. And everybody's like, "Girl, I get it."

Kirsten Parker:





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Yes. There's no shaming. But you don't overcorrect in the way that you do with polite society where you're like, I'm just going to pretend this thing didn't happen. It's like, oh no, this thing happened. And that was so much of my work in the beginning was getting out of my good student head, which you helped me with. But I'm sure I'm not the only one who's ever experienced that in your group.

Maggie Reyes:

Can you talk about that a little bit? Because I am also that person who wants to be in the front row raising my hand, good student energy. And I think a lot of my listeners are like that. So tell us just a little bit about how you got out of that mindset.

Kirsten Parker:

Well, I really had to claim my place in, okay, I'm here for me, which you make it really easy to do. Because my instinct whenever I join anything is like, okay, I got to sit at the front of the class. I got to do a good job. I got to make this investment worth it. I got to take all the notes. I got to read all the material. Just because that's what good students do.

And I joined the program in a very different situation than anyone else. I'd only been married less than a year at that point. And I met my husband a year before we got married, so it was a very new relationship across the board. And people come to your group from all kinds of situations.

And so there was a story available to me in my head, which is, your problems aren't as big as anyone else's. You're not recovering from any kind of catastrophe, quote unquote. There were a





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lot of stories available to me that was just like, you should just be quiet and sit in the back and take notes.

And I had to give myself permission, which again, I credit you with making the space so safe, to just be like, we're all here for the same objective. Even though that destination point looks different for everyone and the route looks different for everyone. It's like, all we need is the same objective. Figure out what's the best marriage I can have with this person and then do I want that marriage?

And so I had to give myself permission for that to just be valid. You're allowed to not have, in your mind huge, huge problems, huge, huge history and still deserve Coaching on it. And then I had to let go of, I'm sure what you run into very often, which is this idea that, well, I'm smart so I shouldn't have started that fight.

Maggie teaches a tool for this. So I should have just done these three steps. And then I could see myself not doing the three steps. And then I went there anyway. And then there's that instant self shaming instinct.

And it was so nice because I remember Judith pointed out to me one time, she's like, "I think you're just really hard on yourself and I want to give you an internet hug because you're trying so hard." And it's such a supportive room where I think the faster... And it was helpful for me to have that pointed out by you, by people in the group who was like...

I think you told me on the first day, because I was like, "I'm trying really hard to... I don't think





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I should have a problem with this, but I do.” And you were like, “We’re not going to spend six months telling ourselves the problems we’re too smart to have.” That’s my paraphrasing, but that’s your wisdom.

So I needed to let go of comparing my reality experience to how it should go. And all my clients do this too. So it’s full circle. But as soon as I could stop, the more and more I could stop doing that, the more I could have compassion for myself.

And then it really is not a one and done. It’s not like you learn a tool and then you act differently forever. I had to have compassion for being a human and then let myself keep practicing. That’s why I’m so grateful that the program is a six month program too.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah.

Kirsten Parker:

Because you had to remind me of that often too. You’re not supposed to learn something one time and then be different forever.

Maggie Reyes:

And I think a couple things, and I’ve had several people who’ve done it twice, been-

Kirsten Parker:

Oh yeah, I can see that.





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Maggie Reyes:

And I remember one, she was like, "The first time I was at the lesson and I heard you teach it." And she's like, "And I feel like I'm hearing it for the very first time." The second time.

Kirsten Parker:

Because there's a lot. There's a lot. And it's not in an overwhelming way because you really do only take what you... I think I said at some point in our halfway mark, I feel like I've just been studying openheartedness, or practicing openheartedness, for three months. It's the only one. Which is fine.

Maggie Reyes:

And that's something that I talk about a lot, I think about the program like a buffet. I want you to have all these different things you can choose from, but then you pick the flavors you like, the combinations you like, the things you want to do.

So yeah, we're going to talk about soul centered communication. We're going to talk about internalized patriarchy. We're going to talk about holistic sex tools, we're going to talk about these things. But you may not be in a space where you even need that.

But six years from now when you're like, oh, I need the... Open the pdf, you're going to be like, oh yeah, that's right. This will help me. So I really take a long term view on some of the things that I'm teaching them. But then during the live program, I really feel like, pick one thing that calls to you and if the whole time we're together, that's all you do. Bring it.





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Kirsten Parker:

Yeah. Yeah. Which you do a really good job of reiterating that all the time. And I think that's another thing that freed me up to just be like, okay, no, you're here to learn what you're going to learn. And it goes back to why I joined, because like I said, I've never been an expert in, let alone marriage, I've never been an expert in relationships, relating to other people. I'm good at decisions on my own. And this is why I'm going to hit you on my podcast so we can be decisions and couples.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes.

Kirsten Parker:

It's a whole other ballgame.

Maggie Reyes:

It's a whole other thing.

Kirsten Parker:

And I could see so many of my habits that I was like, yep, this isn't going to change on its own. So no, do you have 20 years of history married to this person having the same fight over and over again? No. But can you foresee that happening? Yeah. Why don't we just do it now?

Maggie Reyes:

Yes. I love that so much. And I want to speak to that too, where we have a very wide variety of





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years married, of ages, of backgrounds, of ethnicities, of circumstances. So people will ask me sometimes like, "Oh, can I do it if I have this?" Or, "Could you do it if you have that?"

And every single cohort has been, it is a really interesting group of people because our values, if you listen to this podcast, our values are very aligned. But everybody is so different and unique and has such a fascinating different combination of life experiences, which I think it really helps to see people in completely different backgrounds and experiences and cultures. And then you're like, oh yeah, but I also get mad about that same one thing or whatever the thing is.

Kirsten Parker:

100%. It happens so often when someone shared something and then someone else was like, "So I feel like I'm living your life," or, "Samesies." And it's just so important to normalize that it shouldn't be easy. One of my favorite things that I teach clients all the time who are like, I don't know what I want. I don't know the decision. If it were easy, it would be easy.

Maggie Reyes:

Oh, that's so good. If it would be easy, it would be easy.

Kirsten Parker:

Yeah. And that's the thing where we come to our relationships and we're like, oh, but I just can't, I don't want to get mad about this stupid thing I'm getting mad about. But I get so frustrated and then I'm mad at myself for it. And if it were easy, if it were easy to just not care, it'd be easy. So since it's not, let's figure out how to make it easier. Just get Maggie's help.





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Maggie Reyes:

I love it. How do you really feel Kirsten, it's so funny. But here's what's coming up for me that I want to share is for some reason I'm getting this image. Before I was married, I dated a guy who had a son and his son while we were together, I want to say he was six or seven years old.

And I would spend a lot of time with this little boy. And one day we went roller skating and he had never roller skated before. And if anyone had done any kind of skating, you know that even though you know how to walk and even though you have balance and even though you may have rhythm, you may have all of these things.

To have all those things together on a skate is a new skill. And I remember being at the skating rink and for an hour just watching this little boy stand up and fall down and stand up and fall down. And he was having the best time. And now as a Coach, I look back in that moment, I'm like, why was he having the best time? He wasn't judging himself every time he fell. Every time he fell, his thought was, I'm doing it.

Kirsten Parker:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

And to me that's something that as often as I can in as many ways as I can, I try to cultivate that in The Marriage MBA, on the podcast, it's like, it doesn't matter that you're falling, you're falling means you're doing it.





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Kirsten Parker:

Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:

So we can eliminate the part where we beat ourselves up over it and be like, hey, the more you fall, the longer you stand, then eventually you stand longer and you stand longer and you stand longer. And then you can use these skills that are already inside you.

Your ability to walk, your ability to balance, your ability to have rhythm. You can put them together and now you can skate as much as you want. In marriage, it's like we know how to communicate, we know how to give a hug or kiss or we know how to say I'm sorry. Or we know how to ask a question, but now we have to do all that on skates.

Kirsten Parker:

On roller skates. That's so good. But that's so brilliant. And it goes back to the whole, how do you stop being so concerned with doing things correctly and being a good student that you miss out on the opportunity to actually benefit from this stuff. And I would come to calls often and be like, "I started a stupid... I cared about the thing that I didn't want to care about. We just learned this."

That happened all the time. I was like, "We just learned this." And I want to run into my life and use that skill. And you were always like, "Yeah, but you're noticing now." And we have to be like, wait a minute, hold on. So there's one version of life where I start the stupid fight and then just life goes on and I beat myself up about it.





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But I'm still kind of pissed off at the thing that was pissing me off because I didn't know how to investigate it and move through myself through that emotional experience, whatever. And then I do it again and then I do it again.

And that's life. Or there's this other version of life we're living in where it happens and then we are aware that it happened and you were like, "Yeah, that's it, we'll just keep doing that over and over and then you'll be roller skating."

Maggie Reyes:

Yes. Okay. So I really want to ask you, I want to make sure that I ask this is, you had done the makeover and we have a whole hour long talk about all the changes you made and how the things I teach in there helped you. We're not going to rehash that here, but we'll link to that in the show notes.

And then you went and you did The Marriage MBA for the six months. So you did the self study and then you did the intensive live experience. And what I want people to know and hear, my philosophy is everyone in my community, some people might just listen to the podcast and change their whole marriage and be done.

And that's great. And I welcome all of you. That's awesome. If you're doing that, great. Keep it going. And some people will do the self study program and be like, "Okay, that's what I needed. It got me turned around, I'm good." And then some people will want to have the in depth support, have my guidance, have my mentorship.





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Not just my Coaching, but actually guidance and mentorship around different situations. And that's awesome too. I'm here for all of those things, whichever categories people fall into. And I think that for some people they do The Makeover and they're like, "Well, I feel better. I think this is fine."

And there's a deeper place of contentment, satisfaction, self-expression that might be worth exploring in The Marriage MBA, which sounds like it was your experience. You're like, "Okay, this helped me so much, this is amazing, and now this is what I want to create with the next thing."

So I'd love to hear your experience of having made changes just with The Makeover and then coming into The MBA. Anything you want to share around that?

Kirsten Parker:

I mean, I think I was one of your followers, I think I started getting your emails. No, I think, well, I don't know. I don't remember when, because we got engaged super quickly. I was just like, if I'm going to marry this person, I'm going to work with Maggie. I was one of those people because I was just like, this is too important to me to leave it up to...

Maggie Reyes:

To chance.

Kirsten Parker:

Yes. Figuring it out. And I knew myself and I run hot.





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Maggie Reyes:
I love it. I run hot.

Kirsten Parker:
I do.

Maggie Reyes:
Anybody who's listening, I run hot is the way, I say it, I'm Cuban and I'm a Leo. Draw your own conclusions. I just want to translate what I run hot means. Because half of our listeners are like, "What is that?" And the other half are like, "Yeah, I run hot. I know exactly what that is." Okay. Continue.

Kirsten Parker:
Yeah. So I think I was one of those people who was like, I will need help in order not to massively ruin this thing or just cost myself a bunch of time that I don't want to spend fumbling through, whilst I beat myself up, whilst tomorrow's never guaranteed.

So I was sold, I think maybe I was already in a Coaching program or you just weren't enrolling. But I think The Marriage Makeover came out and I was like, I'll take it because I did it live with you. I think that was it.

Maggie Reyes:
Awesome. That's so cool.





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Kirsten Parker:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That was fun. And my experience was, so I knew I was going to get more from you eventually. But I think it was kind of like if The MBA is the business school, then The Makeover was the week long immersion where you figure out, okay, what's this school going to be like?

What are these classes going to be? What's it going to be like to be on campus? And so it was super useful, tangible stuff. It wasn't just like a brochure. We were in it, but I was also experiencing it as if I was like, oh, this is revealing to me everything I don't know. Which is fine, but it's like, yep, I was right. I'm not an expert in this and I will need further guidance.

Maggie Reyes:

There's more to it. Yeah. Yeah. There's more to it.

Kirsten Parker:

But I definitely did, I mean, I didn't do our first podcast because I didn't want to bias myself, but I think that one of the main takeaways from that whole week was you do not know the difference between a demand and a request. I just couldn't figure it out in my mind.

And I was like, okay, well, yeah. So I worked on that during The Makeover and I was like, there's a lot more here. There's a lot more. The drama triangle, which I think falls into the empowerment triangle. Now we have to add stage manager. But did I answer your question? That was my-

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. I think, yeah. So to recap for everyone, it's kind of like when you get that feeling like





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there's more here. Sometimes it's kind of like you've had dinner, you feel full, there's no more to have. And other times you've had dinner or you've had an appetizer, let's do it this way, The Makeover's like you've had an appetizer, but then you filled up on the appetizers and you're good.

You don't even need dinner anymore. And sometimes you have the appetizer and you're like, actually that was great. I really enjoyed that, but now I really need a hearty meal.

Kirsten Parker:
And now I cannot wait.

Maggie Reyes:
Right. Yeah.

Kirsten Parker:
For dinner. And I just know myself and I will think and work on and consume myself with my business all day long. And committing to The MBA was making room for the marriage, like I said, every week on my calendar. But also this is non-negotiable important.

Maggie Reyes:
In our life.

Kirsten Parker:
Yeah.





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Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. And I think when we have businesses or careers that we love, your business doesn't talk back to you. Your business doesn't disappoint you in the way that sometimes a partner can. And it's very easy to find refuge in work. I'm a person who finds work very healing.

And it's very easy to overdo it when that's the case or to lose balance around it. And I was talking to a friend the other day and I'm like, "Oh my gosh. It's kind of like if you're a bodybuilder and you never do leg day," so you have this huge upper body and these huge arms, but you topple over because you never did leg day. And I feel like some of us in our lives, and I've definitely been in the situation, The Marriage MBA is like leg day. We need the thing that sustains everything else. We need that.

Kirsten Parker:

That's so good. Yeah. And of course, you say this all the time too, everything is related to everything. I think there can be a misconception too that, I don't know when I announced to the world, because I talk about you all the time, but when I told everyone I'm doing Marriage Coaching, I'm so excited.

Usually the response from people who don't really know me was like, "Oh, I didn't know there was a problem, so how's the counseling going with you guys?" And I was like, I didn't say any of those words, but I think that's the misconception in our society that if you have to work on something, it's because there's a problem and you did something wrong, something's wrong with somebody. I hope this leaf blower is not messing our universe up.





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Maggie Reyes:

No, it's good. I think that there's a stigma also, number one, if there is a problem in getting help, because we're resilient women who are so powerful and can figure it out all on our own. So there's that stigma.

And then I really think sometimes about there are marriages where you've gone through a breach of trust or you've gone through a tumultuous experience that you really do need to rebuild and decide what your marriage 2.0 looks like. And then there's marriages where you have a low grade annoyance that never goes away.

That's very imperceptible, but it colors every interaction. And that's poison. That's a slow poison. There's a thing that's a very visible, something's wrong, we have to do something. And then there's the slow poison that also you're cranky, you're not your best version of yourself. All of these different things arise from that.

And so in the program, it's really because the things that I teach, these are the fundamental things for thriving. Use them, don't use them, use them as much or as little as you want. But in order to thrive, we want you to have a good, well-rounded approach.

And I take it all through the lens of perspective, partnership, pleasure, personal power, Every tool that I teach you or every concept that we talk about, is it helping you shape your perspective from a more empowered place? Is it helping you cultivate partnership from a loving but again, empowered place?





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Not from, I'm just going to agree to everything. No. I'm going to check in on what I actually want and how do I build partnership around that. And then pleasure. Are we having fun? It's so essential. And so many of us, and I've done this in different situations in my life, if we're going through one of those big things, a breach of trust, some kind of tumultuous emotional activation, we're like, oh, no fun now.

No fun until we figure out how we're going to live for the next 30 years. No fun. And it's like, no, no, no. What you need is to have some fun to figure out how you're going to live for the next 30 years. And I think that's so important.

And then the personal power part around, I get to have the marriage I want, I get to show up for it. I am not going to add more things to my to-do list that I don't actually want to do. I'm going to start removing some things that I don't want to do. And the thing that I teach so much in the makeover, which is you go first, it's not that you do all the work, it's never about that. It's just that you go first.

Yeah. Okay. What's on your list that we haven't touched upon yet?

Kirsten Parker:

Well, I think we covered everything except for at the end of the program you asked us to reflect on the main, our main takeaways. And it's so funny because I think that going into the program, I don't think I knew my main growth area.

I knew I ran hot and I knew I had certain things that I wanted to learn more about from The





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Makeover especially and from your podcast. But I think by going through the six months, I learned that, oh, I have a misunderstanding that you cannot stay connected if you are experiencing friction.

And one of the main, main things that I learned, and not even a concept is the tool or skill that I built and am still building is you can stay connected with that. It's not either/or, you're not either we don't fight or fighting and totally disconnected. And in my mind I was like, how, what? I didn't even know that was a thing. And I learned that it is a thing. You can absolutely stay connected.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes. It's so funny, I was talking with my husband about this yesterday. We were talking about a friend of ours who's really upset about something with someone, this group of friends. And what we were noticing was that he and I have this ability, which is I can be really mad at him for something and still acknowledge he's a good person.

I have had times, I remember, where one day I was crying and I was like, "I'm really mad about this, but I know you're trying and I know you're a good person, but this really upset me." And I was able to hold those two opposites at the same time.

And what happens to most of us is we go to black and white thinking and then we villainize our partners and we're like, "I'm really mad about this and you're the villain of my story. And it's terrible. And it's awful." And then we also discount all the good things.

And what we were talking about with our friends was like, for me as a friend watching from the





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outside, I was kind of like, I'm kind of upset that my friend's pretending none of these other good things happened and all these other things were good.

And this thing was, I'm not condoning this other thing. I'm just saying we forgot, we got amnesia that these other things were good. And so my husband and I were like, "What is it that we do that allows us to experience that same circumstance differently?"

And it's this idea that we can hold an opposite at the same time. We can be like, this sucks. It's not okay. I never want it to happen again. And I know you didn't do it on purpose, or I know that you didn't mean it how it came out, or I know that you could just be a good person who did something that sucked or whatever the thing is.

Kirsten Parker:

Yep, yep. In my mind, in my theater mind, the way I teach this concept to my clients, which is the way my brain had to process it, is the improv technique of yes and.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes.

Kirsten Parker:

The rule of improv is as long as you always respond with yes and, we keep going, scene keeps going. As soon as you shut something down, you're like, "No, we're not at Oprah's house, we're at the beach." It's like, what, no, you killed the scene.





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Maggie Reyes:
Don't kill the scene.

Kirsten Parker:
The yes and is like, Yes, I feel this and I feel this. Yes, this is true. And at the same time, this is true. And I think I needed to find out those things were possible. You can stay connected and not like something somebody did.

Maggie Reyes:
I love yes and, I love the example so much because even the example you gave of, we're at Oprah's house, no, we're at the beach. Yes and is, we're at Oprah's house, at the beach.

Kirsten Parker:
Yes and we're at the beach. Who knew Oprah had a beach house?

Maggie Reyes:
And you keep going. I think that is such a beautiful way to approach, and here's something that I talk about in The MBA and I want everyone listening to hear, is when I teach you something, I invite you to make it your own. I teach you the idea. Hold an opposite, whatever we just talked about.

And then in Kirsten's brain, that becomes a whole new idea, which is yes and. Then you internalize it and then you can use it and then you can make it whatever you need it to be for your relationship. And I think that's so important coming from HR where we had a lot of rules and





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a lot of things and it had to be this way.

And if it wasn't this way. It's like, that's not the point. The point is what works for you? What works in your brain? What will help you remember? Whatever helps you remember is welcome here.

Okay. So at the end of our interviews, I always ask a question from The Questions for Couple's Journal. And I was telling Kirsten before we hit record, I'm so excited to ask this question. And it's a little bit kinky, so everybody prepare.

So you know how in kinks people have safe words. And I thought, what if people had safe words for arguments? So the question is this, when you're having a disagreement, what is a code word or phrase that would A, indicate you need to take a break now and B, make you smile?

So everyone answer along with us. If you want to have fun with it, tag me in Instagram, I'm @themaggiereyes, I totally want to hear your safe words. Your kinky argument safe word that would totally just disrupt the energy if you suddenly said, I don't know, watermelon, whatever. So what would your word be?

Kirsten Parker:

This is the perfect, I'm so excited the universe decided this was the question for me because being an enthusiastic studier of your stuff, I didn't get rid of my good studentness completely, but I did conscript my husband into this.

He was all for me joining this program. He was excited to hear about what I learned and when I





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really, I'm not kidding, three months minimum on this open-hearted stuff. But I explained to him like, "Oh, I figured out something that's happening when we have the fights," and he was like, "Oh, tell me everything."

I was like, "Okay, so Maggie teaches this concept openheartedness, and if you can remain openhearted, even through an argument, you can stay connected." And I was like, "You are really good at staying openhearted." And he was like, "Thank you. I don't know really what that means."

And I was like, "Well, Maggie explains it very simply, you're openhearted if you're huggable." And he was like, "Oh, I am really good at that." Because I'm not, if there's friction, I want to throw something, slam a door and be on the other side.

Well, I used to be, I'm actually not like this anymore, which is fun. It's so much better. But I used to be like, I want to make a lot of noise and be far away. And he was always naturally good at openheartedness.

So I was telling him this, I was like, "I learned this thing and I'm going to try to get good at it." And he was like, "Okay." And when I was explaining, "You're huggable, that's what it is," he was like, "Like a teddy bear."

And he put his little fists, his little closed hands on his head that was like, this is me being a huggable, openhearted teddy bear. And then I swear to God the next day I wanted to start some silly stupid argument. And he raised his hands up to make a little bear ears. And I was like, "Oh,





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you're right."

Maggie Reyes:
And then you laughed.

Kirsten Parker:
I'm not huggable right now. And it's our safe word. It's not kinky, but it's literally-

Maggie Reyes:
That's the best. Yes.

Kirsten Parker:
We made an agreement without needing to say it out loud that we're in for this concept, we would really enjoy to be able to disagree, but stay huggable.

Maggie Reyes:
Teddy bear energy. That's so awesome.

Kirsten Parker:
Because he's not a small man. I mean, he's taller than me and he's strong and big. So it's my favorite thing.

Maggie Reyes:
I love that so much. And I love the example of dissipating the energy with humor whenever it's





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appropriate, whenever we have the opportunity, if we ever can, it's such a powerful tool. This big strong guy pretending to be teddy bear face whatever, teddy bear pose.

It's just like, oh, it just diffuses what was there. Doesn't mean you don't have to address it. It doesn't mean you don't talk about it. Doesn't mean you don't work it out. But it diffuses the intensity of it so that you can address it.

Kirsten Parker:

Yeah. And it's not, you're starting a stupid fight. You shouldn't think what you think, you shouldn't feel what you feel. You're not doing it right. It's just like, oh, can we come back together and laugh for a second?

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. It's remember we love each other. Hey, hold on.

Kirsten Parker:

That's it. Remember we love each other. That's it. That's so good.

Maggie Reyes:

And from that place, let's work out whatever we have to work out.

Kirsten Parker:

Yeah. Because that's what we're here for. I mean, I think that's really what... I don't believe that marriages that end are failures. And once you get married, you should be married forever





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because that's what we should do. But I do think we should enjoy the time we have. Period. We should enjoy how we choose to spend our time.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes.

Kirsten Parker:

At least I should. I can't speak for anybody else, but that's the only should that I'm into in my life is I should be able to enjoy how I'm choosing to spend my limited unguaranteed time. And I think that your program is so helpful in helping us remember you chose this and not in a, "this is your fault" way. Remember, you love each other. So let's make the most of this in the way we want to, not in the way our animal brains want us to.

Maggie Reyes:

And also if you would do these things, so you were openheartedly sharing about this thing that you're working on and you wanted to recruit your husband to be your partner in exploring it. And some of you are going to be listening to this podcast and be like, "My husband wouldn't be interested in this conversation."

Or, "My wife would never go for this or whatever." And I just want to say, some of you are genuinely married to jerks, but most of you are just married to people having bad days. And what we need to do is that we need to identify that.

So if you're with a person where you would come openheartedly and say, "I want to get better





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at something,” and they would not be into helping you or listening to you about it, I always say, that’s data you want to have. Let’s get you that data right the heck now.

I had a couple people apply for the next cohort of The Marriage MBA and they described their situation to me. And I’m telling you, everyone who’s listening to me right now, if you’re in a situation where you think this example might apply, listen to the podcast called Deal Breakers.

Just go listen to that. Go listen to that podcast first and then see if you want to join The Marriage MBA and strengthen the relationship that you’re in. After a questioning of like, wait, is this relationship a relationship I want to invest in strengthening.

That’s a question to ask from a clearheaded, loving, grounded place. And so somebody wrote to me and said, “After I listened to the podcast, I’ll let you know if I still think it’s a good idea to do the program.” And I’m like, this is what we’re here for. This is what it’s about.

Kirsten Parker:

Yeah. And I think that’s the biggest difference that if I had to explain what’s the difference that we feel like on the ground every day in our relationship from The MBA. It’s the transparency because it’s not, “I learned a tool and now I need to perform perfectly over here.”

We’re very open about our real time experience, which is different than indulging the drama of it. But it’s really like I’m having trouble holding... We just had a conversation about that. I don’t have to go into the whole story, but we had a situation where I was not the best person to hold space for what he was needing space for.





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And it was messy, but that was so allowed. I got to tell him, "I'm really struggling to respond in a way that I think that you want and deserve because of my own stuff that's in my head about this thing." And he was like, "I'm really disappointed about that."

And I was like, "I know it's disappointing." And it was just like we were with each other through the messiness. It's not like he wasn't disappointed. It's not like I wasn't uncomfortable. That transparency and that taking each other with each other through our experiences is everything because it's so different than totally disconnecting and then taking a week to get back together or come back together and then not acknowledging it, not really making progress because we didn't actually talk about any of the real stuff going on.

Maggie Reyes:
I love that example.

Kirsten Parker:
It's going to make a difference forever. If you have been married for 5, 10, 15 years, then just join it. For sure. But if you just got married, if you're new, join yesterday because it's going to change, I can see the highway we're not taking and I'm so grateful. The highway to just like...

Maggie Reyes:
Now I'm speechless. So we're going to end the episode on that note. While I recover my ability to make words and sentences.





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Kirsten Parker:
You're a life changer.

Maggie Reyes:
So Kirsten, I receive that with so much love and gratitude and so much joy. And if there's anything I convey on the podcast is that it's truly a collaboration. I think about these things and I teach these things, but it's from a place of, I'm using all the tools too.

I remember, I've said on the podcast before where I recently had this situation where I was like soul centered communication, uncomplicated, remember? Remember? I just want to make that really clear that it's totally a collaboration.

So I receive that, that I'm a life changer. And I also always want to remind everyone listening and you, it's like you changed your life. I was just there to help you with the things you wanted to change in a collaborative way.

Kirsten Parker:
Yes and.

Maggie Reyes:
Yes and. Heck yes. We're at Oprah's house on the beach. Tell people how to find you Kirsten, Decision Making Coach.

Kirsten Parker:





EPISODE 122: PRACTICING OPENHEARTEDNESS IN YOUR MARRIAGE WITH KIRSTEN PARKER

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/122](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/122)

I'm at kirstenparker.com. I am on Instagram @KPCoaching. And you can follow the Decision Master's podcast because we're having nothing but fun over there too.

Maggie Reyes:

I love it so much. Thank you everyone for listening. If you want to join The Marriage MBA, go to marriage, not marriage, go to [maggiereyes](https://maggiereyes.com), see, I forgot how to make words, go to maggiereyes.com/group. If it's open for a moment when you listen to this, you'll see all the instructions. If it's not, you'll see exactly what to do to get on the wait list. We love you all. Thank you for spending time with us today. Thank you Kirsten. Bye everyone.

