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FOR LOVE OR MONEY

Author: Brenda van Zijl

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We have a lot to celebrate this Woman's Day: 60% of all tertiary degrees are awarded to women; since the mid-90's female participation in the labour force has increased by 38% and almost half of the members of parliament are women.¹ And it is not just South Africa that seems to think the best man for the job is a woman - over the past year the United Kingdom, Taiwan, Myanmar, Nepal, Croatia, Mauritius and Lithuania have all elected or re-elected female leaders to their countries' highest office.

But while gender equality is improving in the workplace, most of us are partners, wives and mothers too, bringing us to one of the stickier issues of life: Climbing the corporate ladder might have become easier, but are women achieving financial independence in their personal lives?

Finances are one of the top reasons why marriages fail. Not because married couples tend to run out of money, but because they do not talk about it! Couples (usually) discuss most deal breakers before they tie the knot (religion, having children/not, where to live). But somehow the money conversation just never happens. Especially when love is in the air it seems so materialistic to talk about money, doesn't it? But putting it out there while you are in love might just make your love last.

Here's why: Big life events don't only have emotional implications but financial ones as well. Too often I see couples make these important decisions without having the money conversations that go with it.

Take for instance starting a family. You love your bundle of joy and you decide to work part-time or be a full-time mother. But have you considered the profound impact on your finances? You either have less of your 'own money' now, or you don't earn any money at all. Adding a baby to the equation means an increase in family expenses. Have you adjusted your budget accordingly?

These are very important conversations to have *before* the baby arrives. It is not ones to have after a few late – or sleepless - nights. Start by drawing up a budget. This takes the emotion

out of the conversation by presenting the hard facts. Often women who don't work feel dis-empowered to discuss money matters freely so it's better to start this conversation *before* you give up your paying job. Talk about where you may have to tighten your belt and decide together where to make adjustments to your lifestyle. Whether you work inside or outside the home, you should have some discretionary spending money. Decide on a monthly amount that you need for personal expenses and transfer this money to your personal bank account. Also, because you no longer have your own pension fund you should provide in the budget for an allocation of money to replace your pension fund contribution.

Another elephant in the room is the antenuptial contract if you're getting married or a legal agreement if you decide to live together. Be involved from the start in drawing up these documents and get independent advice if you are not clear on all the terms and conditions. Love may be blind, but when it comes to the legal aspects of your union, you should have your eyes wide open. Women often act in good faith in marriages and relationships just to end up financially short changed by the law. Nobody wants to think it can end when you are starting out, but unfortunately divorce rates are on the increase. Make sure you have a fair distribution of assets registered in each party's name. If you don't, and your relationship ends, you'll have to fight to get what is rightfully yours. This usually involves significant legal fees and often the party with the deepest pockets triumphs.

Many women still leave the family finances up to their husbands or partners. Traditionally the mother's time, attention and money was spent on looking after the family – buying the groceries, clothes, and other consumables while the father gathered assets like the house and the investments. Just as the role of the father has changed over the last couple of decades, so has the mother's role. We work, we run companies, we start our own businesses – shattering the glass ceilings - but women also need to be financially responsible and assertive.

You need to take a seat at the table and be involved in the financial decisions of your family. It is not only about drawing up a budget and deciding on a fair allocation of expenses. Bring home your professional dynamism to discuss more visionary money matters such as financial goals and how to achieve them.

An encouraging thought from Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg that counters the high divorce rate: *"When woman work outside the home and share breadwinning duties, couples are more likely to stay together. In fact, the risk of divorce reduces by about half when a wife earns half the income and a husband does half the housework."*

1 - PWC 2016 Executive Directors Practices and Remuneration Trends Report.

Brenda van Zijl is an Independent Financial Planner and the owner of Verity Financial Services in Johannesburg. Visit www.verifyfs.co.za for more insights on how to journey financially successful through life. The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own.