

# 'Magic 6 hours' could dramatically improve your relationship

In six hours a week, you can dramatically improve your relationship, says expert John Gottman in his newly revised, "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work." (Stephen Morris/iStockphoto, Getty Images)

With 6 extra hours per week (and a few awkward questions), you could dramatically improve your marriage

When John Gottman talks, I listen.  
Actually I've never heard him talk, but when he writes, I read.

So when a newly revised edition of his best-selling "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work" (Harmony Books) hit my desk this week, I cracked it open immediately.

Gottman is a psychology professor at the University of Washington and the founder/director of [The Gottman Institute](#), a marital research and counseling center in Seattle.

Maybe you've [read about his theory](#) on "master couples" versus "disaster couples."

Co-authored with Nan Silver, "Seven Principles," which has sold a million-plus copies, was first released in 1999 — before Tinder, before Facebook — heck, before some of us even had cellphones.

The updated version (out next week) offers tips for dealing with digital distractions, including Gottman's suggestion to agree on rules of tech etiquette: How much are you comfortable with your partner sharing on social media? When is texting/posting off-limits (mealtimes, date nights)? Do you create cyber-free zones in your home?

Most compelling of all, though, is Gottman's "magic six hours" theory, based on interviews with couples who attended marital workshops at The Gottman Institute.

"We wondered what would distinguish those couples whose marriages continued to improve from those whose marriages did not," Gottman writes. "To our surprise, we discovered that they were devoting only an extra six hours a week to their marriage."

If your first thought is, "Only? Where am I going to find an extra six hours in my week?" — I hear you.

If that was not your first thought, forget I said anything. Anyway, back to the winning formula.

Couples who saw their relationships improve devoted extra time each week to six categories.

### **First up: Partings**

"Make sure that before you say goodbye in the morning you've learned about one thing that is happening in your spouse's life that day," Gottman writes. "From lunch with the boss to a doctor's appointment to a scheduled phone call with an old friend." (Two minutes per day for five days, for a grand total of 10 minutes per week.)



[Funny men are better in bed, says new study](#)

### **Second: Reunions**

Gottman recommends greeting your partner each day with a hug and kiss that last at least six seconds and ending each workday with stress-reducing conversation that lasts at least 20 minutes. (About 1 hour and 40 minutes per week.)

### **Third: Admiration and appreciation**

Spend five minutes every day finding a new way to communicate genuine appreciation for your spouse, he says. (35 minutes per week.)

### **Fourth: Affection**

"Show each other physical affection when you're together during the day, and make sure to always embrace before going to sleep," he writes. (Five minutes per day, seven days a week: 35 minutes.)

### **Fifth: Weekly date**

For two hours once a week, Gottman recommends one-on-one time, during which you ask each other open-ended questions. "Think of questions to ask your spouse, like, 'Are you still thinking about redecorating the bedroom?' 'Where should we take our next vacation?' or 'How are you feeling about your boss these days?'" (2 hours per week.)

### **Sixth: State of the union meeting**

Spend one hour a week talking about what went right that week, discussing what went wrong and expressing appreciation for each other. "End by each of you asking and answering, 'What can I do to make you feel loved this coming week?'" he writes. (1 hour per week.)

All of it adds up to six hours per week.

Some of these suggestions sound a tad awkward. "What can I do to make you feel loved this coming week?" reminds me a little too much of the last time I bought a car. ("What can I do to earn your business today?")

But I like to think of marital advice like the food pyramid: You're not going to adhere to it every day, but it's an instructive guide to shape your habits around.