



The Millennial Life

podcast

with Liz Higgins

Episode 7: Real Talk: The Mindset Shifts That Are Saving My Marriage

Liz Higgins (00:02):

Hey, y'all, Liz Higgins here and welcome to the Millennial Life Podcast, where my main goal is to share conversations that will inspire you and drive you toward the life and relationship you desire. As millennials, we value our wellness, mental health and the quality of our relationships, yet most of us weren't handed the tools and knowledge we need to truly succeed and be fulfilled in these areas of life. I'm here to give you the insights I've gained as a licensed therapist specializing in millennial relationships, as well as transformative conversations with other professionals. Thanks for listening, and enjoy today's episode!

Liz Higgins (00:48):

Welcome to today's episode! I'm so excited that you're here tuning into another solo episode that I'm putting out for y'all, and I hope there are some shifts and transformational concepts that you can take away from today and implement into your life and relationship.

Liz Higgins (01:08):

Today, what I really want to dive into with you are some of the mindset shifts that I truly believe have saved my marriage. I know that sounds dramatic, but it is accurate. It's so true for me. I've said it before in earlier episodes, and I will say it now: becoming a licensed therapist has been a true gift for me on a deeply personal level. Beyond just being such a fulfilling path to take career wise, it's taught me so much about myself, about the potential that my committed relationship with my husband has to give me a great quality of life and... Taking that chance has - at least up to this point in my life - brought much more opportunity, much more joy, love, laughter...

Liz Higgins (02:13):

And honestly, y'all, just happiness than if I had taken another path. So, I'm beyond grateful to have some of these concepts to share with you - both from a place of just gaining this understanding through study, through education, training and coaching. So let me jump right into the first mindset shift that really transformed the way I was thinking about relationship. And, unfortunately, I can't even really pin down where I really stepped over that threshold of not believing this or wishing for something different and actually believing this is true. But nonetheless, this one is that my partner won't complete me. Again, sounds simple. It sounds basic, but this one has been so complex for me and I've come to find for so many other millennials, right? Um, I think in a lot of ways we are a jaded generation and we have a hard time as adults now believing in lots of idealistic concepts and things out there.

Liz Higgins (03:25):

But, this idea that a relationship could complete us, that we could find somebody that truly just fits like a glove and makes our life perfect... I think that it's human nature to crave a piece of that. But the reality of relationships is simply that that's not the case. What I've come to learn about relationships is that it's not half and half. It is not 50/50. And I work with clients today that

will come in and say things like, you know, “You're not doing your part; I'll budge when I see that you're trying; I will start putting in the effort when I see that you're doing it, too.” And it's a quick path to really being in this rigid place of, honestly, stalemating, where you're just not budging. There's no growth, there's no movement. And it leads to something that's called conditional change.

Liz Higgins (04:26):

It's that whole thing of “I'll change when you change.” And if we're going to be sitting around waiting for that to occur, we'll be waiting for a long time. Because, other thing about millennials - we don't like to feel parented by our partners. We don't want to feel controlled or manipulated into that kind of position. And I tell people all the time, like that's the beautiful thing about committed relationships today. We don't have to be in that kind of position. We don't need to be coercing each other to change or forcing each other to budge first and then you'll get to experience me putting effort into these issues or whatever. The real key to a successful modern relationship is that you're putting in all of yourself, you're giving a hundred percent; and that might not look like giving your all to the relationship itself, but it is putting a hundred percent of you day in and out into being the best version of you.

Liz Higgins (05:28):

And if what you've decided for yourself is that you value being in a committed relationship, and that that's a piece of your pie chart of all the valuable things in your life that you're going to be investing yourself in, then yeah, you better believe that is going to require you making effort. You stretching yourself, you growing to try new things - sometimes things that you would never normally have done as a single individual person, but will choose to do for the sake of a relationship working. I think for me, when I allowed myself to relax into this truth that my husband's a great person, but he's not meant to fill in all of my holes. He's not meant to fill in all the gaps and all of the weaknesses or the shortcomings, um, that are within me. It's, it's my job to look at those things.

Liz Higgins (06:26):

And it's my job to hold onto myself and to know who I am or at least to keep discovering that, at least to keep exploring that. I shouldn't expect him to all of a sudden enter into my life and provide me with the path to the rest of myself. That's not what he's here for. So it's a really big mindset shift to consider. If what I'm talking about feels... like gives you feelings of uneasiness, or anxiety, or “what the hell is she talking about?”, I encourage you to look at that a little bit because truly, your partner is not your other half. And we have all these sayings in our culture for, like, the opposite of this truth. Like, “my partner will complete me. My partner will complete me. He's the yin to my yang. He's my everything. My partner makes me whole.” And let's be honest, right?

Liz Higgins (07:28):

Some days I might tell my husband, “Hey, you're my everything”, but he knows what I'm talking about there. We have these kinds of conversations. We've actually talked about the fact that we're not meant to complete each other. We're not meant to do all the work for each other. We're going to compliment each other. We're going to merge with each other. We're going to collaborate and create a life together. And there's a lot of connectedness that will come from all of those things. But getting out of the mindset that he is here to meet these needs for me and to fix these things about me and to complete me, it's helped me a lot to shift away from that. And to more of a, like I said, collaborative mindset about it. I see him as a coauthor of this life we're

creating together. There's going to be lots of edits. There's going to be lots of revisions, but the commitment is always there that we've chosen each other and we'll keep choosing each other for that journey. It won't always be pretty and it won't always feel great, but it sure does feel intentional. And something about that is just so precious to me and more valuable to me than scrambling for somebody that can heal all the missing parts of me that I'm still looking for.

Liz Higgins (09:07):

Okay. Shifting into a second mindset shift that I truly believe has impacted me and how I show up in my relationships and maybe even saved my marriage - Marriage is not just saying yes to someone else. Marriage is not, you know, like getting engaged, that whole experience, that moment, which in many, many, couple experiences out there is still this extravagant thing that we do to make that proclamation 'We're going to do this. We choose each other. We are engaged. Here's the ring. Here's whatever.' Maybe he did it, maybe she did it. Like, that moment, you don't realize what you're really saying 'yes' to. And what I have come to realize since being engaged, since getting married, since becoming a therapist and relationship coach, is that I was not just saying 'yes' to my husband. What I was saying 'yes' to was him, to accepting that path of building a life together.

Liz Higgins (10:18)

But it was also saying 'yes' to me. Saying 'yes' to commitment and being in a longterm monogamous relationship especially, is accepting this journey to discover your best self. Because being in a healthy relationship in today's world, it's not enough anymore to just go through the motions and to just put a ring on it and buy a house and have children and act like you like each other, when on the inside, you can't stand it anymore. That doesn't work anymore. And that's why people leave. So you have to understand that if you're not fulfilled and you're not on an internal journey as a self, (whatever that might look like) then you at least need to embrace the fact that you're going to have to eventually face that. Because your relationship today, in all relationships today, (I believe in our modern Western culture) they require a balance of interdependence, but also two whole selves that are working towards cultivating a life that they're excited to live.

Liz Higgins (11:31):

And a lot of times for millennials, that means a life that will lead them to being able to make an impact, being able to leave a legacy, being able to feel proud of themselves and that they were part of something. And so, it's going inward, and it's being able to acknowledge like, "Okay, I'm not perfect. And, there are some things that I could look at." Because accepting this journey to your best self means... It brings up so much. It really does y'all. And it, it truly means that you're going to look at these parts of yourself that could really connect down to some deeper pains, um, some deeper wounds, self esteem dynamics. And even looking just at the history that you came from, the legacy of your family and the ways that people were in their relationships.

Liz Higgins (12:28):

There's a saying in the therapy world that we repeat what we don't repair. And it is so true. If we're not aware of the tendencies throughout our family and I'm talking generations past, then there's actually a likelihood that we will just inherently carry out and live on with these characteristics in ourselves. Some of those things can be as obvious as stuff like abuse or, you know, a culture of name calling, a culture of, like, dominant masculinity and submissive, feminine roles. And just things that are like obvious to point out in the patterns of your family dynamics. And other things are way more subtle. Like for example, the way that toxic shame

and low self esteem can inhabit people. They don't even realize how poorly they feel of themselves. They're just great at being a people pleaser, right? I mean, we could probably talk for hours about the kinds of things you could dig up and explore throughout your family of origin, which by the way, um, as much as I talk about maybe painful points and growth areas, there are also strengths and things that build us up to be able to weather the storms of life - characteristics that we also gained from history. History and generations' past of people pushing through adversity and coming out of the worst, hardest situations.

Liz Higgins (14:14)

And those things make us proud and we want to carry on those legacies. But the point here is you've got to have a willingness to look at yourself. You've got to have a willingness to learn the story of who you are, and where you came from, and what you want to become. I encourage you to do that because, if you do, it opens up these floodgates of opportunity in your partnership for, just, a depth that you maybe didn't even realize you could have. And the amazing thing is, when you can include your partner and walk alongside each other in these journeys of self-development and self discovery, it's very powerful. And you share in some really intimate moments and this deeper work is truly this foundation that just makes your relationship this space that is so unique compared to other relationships in your life. And I just want to point out too, that what I'm talking about here, this is the longterm "stuff" of a relationship.

Liz Higgins (15:12):

It's not like you need to leave listening to this, unplug your headphones and go find a therapist right now and get, get knocking into this deep, deep work. I mean, you take steps. I remember for me, a part of this was in grad school, just being told, "Hey, you're going to create this thing called a genogram. And it's like a family map basically, but you're not just looking at who the people were, and you're not just drawing out the family tree. You're learning their stories, you're writing down characteristics." So what did I have to do? I had to go out there and be real intentional. I sat down with my grandma for a couple of hours one day, actually, and it was fascinating. The stories that she told me... And I mean, people love to tell their stories. One day, you're going to love telling your story to your grandchildren or your great grandchildren.

Liz Higgins (16:12):

And that's what weaves us all together is just knowing the story, owning the story, understanding where you fit in to the story of your family and what all that means for you as you embark on a new life, um, as an adult and with another person. So recognize this - marriage and longterm commitment is not just saying 'yes' to somebody else. It's saying 'yes' to you too. Here's another one for you. (And I jotted these down because I just didn't want to forget them.) If it's right, it's still hard. Let me just say that one again. If it's right, it's still hard. We have this idea that if you are with the right person, it should feel easy or it does feel easy. And sure, listen, sometimes it might. And I think our culture has kind of got a little obsessive about chasing that relationship, honeymoon high.

Liz Higgins (17:11):

There's so much dopamine. There's so much oxytocin. There's so much that we are literally experiencing on this physiological level when we meet somebody and have chemistry and connect, and we think "This is it. Oh my God, where have you been all my life?" And I remember that. I remember that part of my relationship with my husband. I think about it. I reflect on it. I miss it. It pops up every now and again, but it's not like it was at the beginning. Things were so different. Things just had this heightened level of intensity and interest and passion to it. Even

just our conversations. It was like, I could feel my heart fluttering when we're just talking about like music that we liked and all of that was supposed to be happening then. And everything I feel right now in my relationship is supposed to be happening right now.

Liz Higgins (18:08):

And it's different and it's still beautiful, but it's very different. We've been through hard times. We have been through hard stuff in life. We've experienced deaths in our family. We've gone through challenging financial phases. We've struggled through the pain of trying to figure out next steps we're taking just as individuals and feeling off in ourselves. Like we've gone through so much and it has not always felt great. It hasn't always felt right. I should say it hasn't always felt easy. That's a much better way of saying it. It hasn't always felt easy and that's never meant we weren't good for each other. That's never... it's never meant that we weren't right for each other. So I think it's, it's definitely important to think on this. I've had lots of clients come in and I, it depends on where they are in their relationships sometimes too.

Liz Higgins (19:09):

But I, I tend to notice that people hold this question when they've been together in that honeymoon phase, that chemistry and, you know, just dopamine-induced phase of their relationship, starting to simmer, and it's starting to transition to something different. And the, the rose-colored glasses kind of start to come down and you really are seeing your partner for who they are, which is a little different sometimes. And those questions start to emerge of like, "Wait, what happened? Like this isn't feeling so easy anymore. What does that mean? Did we make a mistake? Should I question this?" And it's just, it's, it's so important to know that that is actually supposed to happen. This leads me to the next mindset shift that I feel is a core element of a lot of the work I do as a therapist and it revolves around conflict. And here's the fact about conflict.

Liz Higgins (20:15):

All conflict is really an opportunity for growth. So when you think about a relationship, it's a living system. You can almost conceptualize it as like a living organism - it's two people that are developing and growing and changing. Even on biological levels, we change as we grow and as we age and that's inherently going to bring some conflict. I wish there was a better word for it than 'conflict' because it's got such a negative connotation, but I would almost replace it with growing pains. And I just had a flashback to the show Growing Pains, which I'm sure many of you grew up watching just like me, but anyways, I digress. The growing pains of your relationship are really those moments and opportunities that you have to take things to a next level. And when we can start to reframe conflict as an opportunity for growth, as the very moments where we are, we are given an opportunity to stretch and develop.

Liz Higgins (21:34):

I just wonder how that would change a lot of how you experience difficult situations, how you experience yourself, how you experience your partner. Because I think in relationships today, especially for millennials, we've kind of taken conflict as this way to diagnose our relationship as having problems, or we use conflict as a way to point out the faults of our partner. And when I see it become a red flag that, that a person thinks that they're with the wrong person, it's kind of a bummer because that's, that's how they're allowing the experience to frame their partner. And it might not actually be the truth.

Liz Higgins (22:26):

Conflict could really be a way of getting a deeper lens into who your partner actually is. We just have to learn to navigate it better. And that's where as a therapist, I really try to pause people in their conflict and spend minimal time on the actual content of the conflict, because rarely is the issue at its core about household chores or money or frequency of sex or whatever it may be on the surface. It's always something deeper. It's these deeper rooted questions that are almost always geared towards belonging. Connection, feeling loved, feeling enough, which then shifts into our own journeys of self esteem, self worth, self acceptance. The acceptance of the other. These are the bigger, deeper things that really rise to surface when conflict is occurring.

Liz Higgins (23:38):

So I try to put some plugs for couples therapists because, really and truly, it does take a special type of training and a special type of understanding for how to work with systemic issues. And in a couple relationship, that's what we're talking about. It's systemic dynamics, and you want somebody that understands how to help you step back and really see what's happening in your organism, in your living relationship. And from there, you can look at what needs to be adjusted here rather than just staying stuck on the surface, on the content and wasting an hour, wasting 200 bucks complaining about each other.

Liz Higgins (24:24):

So I think that millennials can often slide into that "grass is always greener" mentality, and you know, this isn't new, like... Even Esther Perel - one of my favorite relationship experts - she's incredible. (You should definitely look her up and she's got some excellent podcasts out right now where she actually works with couples.). She says we don't leave relationships because we're unhappy. We leave because we could be happier. And I think I've already mentioned that in another one of my episodes, but it's just one of the sayings that she has that reaches so deep into the core of what I see with clients today. And it's this subtle uneasiness when in a committed relationship of like, wait, like, am I sure this is gonna work? How do I know this is the one? How can I be sure that I'm not limiting myself here? That there's not something better out there?

Liz Higgins (25:27):

And y'all, I get it like as great of a relationship as I had and had been together with my husband for like five years before we got married, I still experienced some of those questions. And I was like, "Where are these coming from?" But again, I've come to learn that this is part of the human experience. Like monogamy isn't necessarily this biologically natural phenomenon that we do. It's a construct that we've created for a lot of great reasons, but it's not supposed to feel easy. It's not necessarily going to leave you, you know, void of all conflict. Like there's, there's work there's effort. And there's lots of stretching that you've got to do to get to a place where you can embrace "I choose this, I choose you. I'm going to hold off on all the other things that could be in the way of relationship, because this can be a great story. This is a great story. This is where I can build my legacy and help you build yours and we can create something amazing." I think that's what is so beautiful about committed relationships too, is, is the real risk, that it takes to embrace, embrace that jump. So I hope there were some takeaways here for you, for you to implement into your life and relationship, experience, or journey. And I look forward to the next time I can share some more thoughts.

Liz Higgins (27:08):

Thanks again for listening to the Millennial Life Podcast. If you liked the show, leave us five stars or write a review. If you want to get your hands on more information, relationship skills or tools, head over to millenniallifecounseling.com and check out my free ebook, “The Five Relationship Mistakes You’re Making and What to Do About Them”. You can also join the mailing list and stay in the loop on updates and new episodes.

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