

MARRIAGE & OPPOSITE-SEX FRIENDS

My wife asked why I was against her being friends with a man at work. I assured her I wasn't jealous and wanted to protect her from his hidden motives.

"A man will be a woman's friend only to get what he wants!" I paternalistically insisted she realize.

That didn't sit well with her. As an executive representing labor unions in the construction industry, she deals with all types and didn't need me to educate her about men.

"Don't we teach our daughters about the equality of men and women?" she rhetorically asked.

That single question challenged me to the core! I thought about it deeply, even as I continued to discourage her from maintaining that friendship. I knew him and even liked him. He also seemed to be happily married, but I couldn't get myself to trust him with my wife. I continued to battle her on this issue. I would ask others for their opinions on opposite-sex friendships, careful not to implicate my wife.

Almost every man would tell me I was "absolutely right," and agreed men couldn't be trusted with women. My generation is more traditional and conservative than the younger generations who might be reading this. But it was interesting that my male friends would almost unanimously bolster my fears and anxieties about women having extramarital friendships.

On the contrary, the women I polled tended to disagree and would challenge my biases. They said there was nothing wrong with healthy opposite-sex friendships, even between married friends.

They weren't referring to romantic friendships or candlelit dinners that compromise even the strongest of marriages, but about platonic friendships that actually benefit marriages. One even pointed out our own friendship and ask why I demanded a different standard for women.

I pondered their perspectives and keen insights. If I was an advocate for equality, I had to learn to fully trust my wife and her choice of friends. I had to refrain from micromanaging her life. I had to truly regard her as an equal partner in our marriage.

After much time, contemplation and some baby steps, I finally was able to let go of the paralyzing control. It wasn't easy at first, but our marriage vastly improved. The less control I tried to exert, the easier it became.

Since letting go and being less jealous around her, she's gladly introduced me to a few more of her professional male friends, is less defensive about bringing them up in conversation, and ultimately our marriage is more loving, healthier and happier than ever before!

Please see References