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KURT & BRENDA WARNER ON WHAT REALLY MATTERS
KURT AND BRENDA WARNER don’t pretend they know the secret formula to a happy marriage. They aren’t saying they’ve figured out a foolproof way to raise seven kids. Actually, they can’t even agree on when to say “no” to autograph seekers dazzled to be in the presence of the quarterback who led the Arizona Cardinals to the 2009 Super Bowl. What they do know is that, first off, you have to make some rules.

In their new book, *First Things First: What Works, What Doesn’t, and What Really Matters Most*, the couple share their story with the hope that they’ll inspire families to hang in there when things get tough—and savor life, every step of the way.

**Vicki:** One of the themes of the book is the challenge of raising kids while living in the public eye. Why write a book like this and let the public in?

**Kurt:** We thought that it would be interesting for some people who don’t see the whole picture. All they see is a football player, a person in that limelight. They think it’s money and it’s fame and it’s all the great stuff. But there are also a lot of challenges that come with that, especially when you have a big family. What I think is so interesting about our story is that it’s not just a football story.

**Kurt:** With the work we do, especially with our foundation [First Things First, kurtwarner.org], we find there’s always that fear. If you allow them to do something that they’ve never done before or to stretch their horizons a bit, there are always risks. Probably even more
so with a special-needs child. But we do want to push him to try new things and to see what he can handle.

Vicki: Brenda, in the book you talk about how your spiky gray hair and your clothes were publicly scrutinized and criticized when Kurt first signed with the NFL in St. Louis. What did you learn from that?

Brenda: I learned that people are mean. That messed with me, because that was the first time in my life that I wasn’t respected for the person that I was because they were only looking at my appearance. I mean, it’s hair. It’s hair! There’s so much more to me.

Kurt: A lot of it seems to go along with my success or my failure. That, you know, when things aren’t going well it’s not just Kurt, now it’s Brenda. When things are going well, Brenda looks great and Kurt’s doing well. It’s one of those things where you realize in this position that you’re only as good as your last game and people are going to find something if whatever they see in their world isn’t going well.

Vicki: How does how you were parented affect how you parent your own children? What have you kept? What have you tossed?

Kurt: I think you try a lot of different things. We might try something that our parents did and then realize we didn’t really like that, let’s try something new. I think that’s where a lot of the rules and stuff from the book came. Something along the way sticks and you go with it.

Brenda: But every child is different, too. And with having seven, I think we have wide eyes to experience that. We honestly have to constantly figure out what works for that child. It’s not black and white.

Vicki: So much has changed for you in the past 15 years, from a life of food stamps and driving old clunkers to playing in the Super Bowl. What will your kids say one day about growing up in the Warner family that remained the same—no matter what?

Kurt: Mom was the strict one…dad was the softie.

Brenda: That they knew they were loved. I really want to raise kids that in every moment knew they were loved. Whether we had money or we had no money. That’s my goal. RAK

RAK Radio
Listen to a podcast of the entire conversation at raisingarizonakids.com. Brenda and Kurt throw out a few rules for fans, talk about why it’s fine to take kids to the grocery store in their pajamas and share what they learned when Zack started riding the city bus.

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