



"7 Tips for Success When You Work as a Couple"

by Bonnie Harvey

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As a public speaker and writer, I am often asked, "What tips do you have for working together with your significant other in a business?" and "What challenges did you have building the Barefoot Wine brand as a woman working as a couple?"

Well, I don't recommend it for everybody. Sometimes it's better for each have a separate career. Separate careers at least give the domestic space a dimension of neutrality and a much-needed break from work. But sometimes, either by choice or a fluke opportunity, you find yourself working together in the same business.

It worked out very well for us because we had several important facets to our success as a couple that made all the difference.

1. Different skill sets. Having respect for the other's skills is essential to any constructive working relationship. Because we each have different skill sets, we complement each other rather than compete. Each of our skill sets was essential to the success of our business. We not only needed each other, but we depended on each other.
2. Positive disagreement. Even though we would have disagreements, we both knew that we had the best interests of the other and the business at heart. We were approaching the same goal from different directions. It was not about ego or who came up with the "right" idea. It was about getting the job done the best way, and considering as many challenges as we could before we took action.
3. No micro-management. I trusted that my partner knew his stuff, and he felt the same about me. Even though we discussed our work and got updates and reviews from time to time, we allowed each other the freedom to perform our jobs unfettered. Although it was sometimes difficult, I would bite my tongue and not be a "back seat driver." That would cause friction and reduce our effectiveness.
4. Unanimous Decisions. If we can't agree, we don't do it. Otherwise, it leads to "I-told-you-so" and hard feelings down the road. In our company, we had a four-member board with two women and two men. We agreed that all our decisions would be unanimous. If three people couldn't convince the remaining one, then maybe there was something wrong with the argument in the first place.
5. 3rd Party Experts. Whenever neither of us knew the answer, and that was quite often, we would bring in third party experts to advise us. We would often get opinions from folks with various skills and experience before taking action. Because we had this policy in advance, whenever we were at a stalemate, we would both agree to defer to the experts. Again, it wasn't about who was right so much as it was about what was right.
6. Separate offices. As soon as we could afford it, we each worked in different places. That gave us the freedom to do our thing our way and not feel like we were under each other's scrutiny. It also prevents the inevitable interruptions that can happen because the other party is so conveniently close.

7. Off- Limits Areas. There are certain places in our home that we endeavored to keep sacred, where no business was conducted. This was especially true of the bedroom. You have to separate yourself as a romantic couple from the workload. This is best done with off-limits areas and times, such as during meals. We also planned non-business vacations without email for several times during the year so we didn't view each other as just business partners.

Working as a couple in business is a challenge, but if you can manage it, it is one of the most rewarding aspects of a relationship. Fortunately for us, we were successful and we continue to enjoy working together.

Together we write weekly blog posts at www.thebrandauthority.net and at www.barefootwinefounders.com. We work as consultants to help small businesses with the lessons we learned together and we even speak publically together. So it is possible to have both a happy and successful business relationship and personal relationship, but you have to play by the rules!