

Business Partners & Marital Partners, Will the Marriage Survive? Part

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By Chuck And Sue DeFiore

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With today's economy, and the layoffs occurring as a result of these economic conditions, more and more people are opting to start their own business. Due to the low start up costs, the prevalence of home-based businesses is on the rise, many of these started by husband and wife teams.

With the move from the corporate world to the home-based, couples are finding that a new set of problems are occurring. In the corporate arena, two major areas of importance are profits and communication with employees. This is done through evaluations, reviews, meetings, or a company newsletter outlining company policies and news. All administrators realize that a happy and informed employee is more efficient and productive; in effect, increasing their profits.

Research on martial separation and divorce indicates two of the main causes of separation and divorce are communication and money, very much like corporate concerns. In the past, spouses worked in their respective jobs, and came home to discuss what was going on in the work place. In effect, they were sounding boards for one another. With the move to the home front, especially with starting up businesses together, the sounding boards are gone.

In effect, placing couples in a start-up business can cause a myriad of problems, previously seen only in the corporate world, in addition to the normal stumbling blocks of starting up a business. Too many couples working together are not practicing good communication skills. Lack of communication, can cause one spouse to feel that he or she is carrying all the business and monetary responsibility.

Keep Your Marriage Solid

If you and your spouse have decided to run a business together, be sure to discuss and outline the following:

Delineate responsibility. Decide who is going to handle what business matters. In addition, be sure you both know how to accomplish these functions. Unfortunately, illness occurs - you need to be able to back up each other in all aspects of the business. For example, if one of you does all the bank statements, be sure your spouse understands how this is accomplished, so if necessary, they can also handle this responsibility. If you have a set procedure you follow and a way you want it done, make up an outline, so it is accomplished in the manner you want.

Marketing, return calls, daily correspondence, invoicing, weekly and/or monthly expenses, supplies, calendaring, appointments, deposits, bank statements, implementation of the business plan, attendance at meetings (e.g. Chamber mixers, National groups, User groups, etc.) all need to be taken care of. You will have to split these responsibilities between you. Again, be sure you know how each is implemented, so in an emergency, you can back each other up.

Delineate responsibilities according to likes and dislikes and who will do the best job. We all have our little niches, and if it is something we like and do well, we can accomplish it better and more efficiently. Once the responsibilities have been delineated, make up a schedule for each item you both need to deal with. Again, you must be able to act as each others back up.

Marketing is a major obstacle. Most individuals do not like to use cold calling as a medium to promote their business. Be sure both of you are involved. Do not let one person handle this. In addition, develop a marketing strategy. Will you market daily, weekly, monthly? What kind of marketing will you do-advertising, cold calls, direct mail, etc. Again, be sure you both are involved. This is important because money and marketing are tied together. The more you market, the more aware the marketplace will be of the services you offer. If only one individual is marketing and monies are fluctuating, there is more tension between the partners to make the business successful. No one individual should have to carry this on their shoulders, or perceive that they do. In addition, with both spouses marketing, one person cannot blame the other for the success or failure of the business.

The Most Important Tool

Remember, the most important tool you both have is communication. Don't expect your spouse to read your mind. Keep the marriage and business separate. It's difficult, especially if you are home-based, but it can be done. If you have a problem with the way your spouse is accomplishing a task in the business environment, discuss it immediately. Do not wait. Do not let this build into anger that is transferred to your personal relationship. Remember that keeping your business and personal relationships separate is very important to the survival of both your business and your marriage.

In Part II of this article we will discuss how to implement this strategy.

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