



Thinking of Starting a Business with Your Spouse? 5 Tips to Ensure Success and Productivity

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It's not uncommon for couples to consider going into business together. After all, your life partner is an easy pick, as many spouses are loyal, supportive and even share the same dreams and goals. Plus, marriage in and of itself is the ultimate test. Like any type of partnership, marriage requires hard work, commitment and compromise.

According to [data](#) from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners in 2007 (the most recent year available), 1.4 million firms were jointly owned and equally operated by a married couple, and that doesn't include the number of sole proprietorships and corporations that are spearheaded by married couples behind the

scenes. That number has also likely gone up as entrepreneurial couples look for their next move, especially most recently in the wake of unemployment due to the pandemic.

Below are tips that can be used to navigate crossing the professional and personal boundaries of starting a business with your spouse.

Set the foundation and align

The first step is to take time to ensure that you and your spouse are on the same page, both personally and professionally, in terms of your respective goals for starting a business.

As [author Mark Manson states](#), clarify what each of you are willing to “suffer for” in support of your business vision. This starts with a clear and all-encompassing [business plan](#). Even though you’ve committed to launching a business with your spouse, the partnership is still a business and should be treated as such.

Carve out time to develop a budget, determine a decision-making process and establish working hours, for example. Having a family business that needs to feed its own growth as well as your family can be stressful. The business plan is created in order to plot out future growth and avoid conflict when it comes to operations, budget and structure. Make sure you’re in agreement as to how money will be divided up between personal and professional expenses, something two non-spousal business partners don’t normally take into consideration.

Commit to co-leading

In order to start up and succeed, there must be a defined structure early on. Identify and outline who will take the lead on different elements of the business. Much like a jazz ensemble, running your own business will require you each to play melody and harmony at different times. Playing the supportive role is just as important as leading the charge, but make it clear who tackles what in order to avoid stepping on one another’s toes and to streamline operations.

If you hit a hurdle and are finding it difficult to agree on something, conduct a low stakes A/B test of the idea. The results may surprise you and you will learn how to move forward in the process.

Listen constantly

Allowing partners to have a voice and be heard is essential to a healthy business partnership (and marriage, for that matter). Practice deep listening to seek your spouse's input, as he or she will be your most critical ally. In every business, spouse or not, it's important to understand where a colleague is coming from. What do they know from their role that you might not be aware of? What pressures are they under?

Deep and active listening helps you both to make the most of every situation without distractions. More productive conversations can lead to new ideas or building out thoughts into stronger concepts that can reinforce your business.

For example, you may think that expanding a product or service offering may seem like the business is losing focus, while your spouse thinks the move will actually require very little work and investment, and have a huge upside with existing customers. How will you know unless you listen?

Have courageous conversations

Even on the worst of days, it's important to remember that conflict is normal, particularly when leading a business with competing priorities and demands, which is why it's key to manage conflict in a healthy manner.

Practice having radically candid conversations with your spouse, combining compassion with candor. Don't let things fester; get everything out on the table so that you can move forward. Unlike a typical business partner, this person is also your life partner, so biting your tongue over and over again may end up spilling over into personal life interactions. Instead, take a deep breath and have the necessary conversation.

Maintain balance and boundaries

It's far too easy to let your business be all-consuming, so much so that you both need to be intentional about balancing your priorities. However, that's easier said than done, especially if you operate a home-based business.

To avoid the lines blurring, set clear office hours and stick to them so that you can make time for what brings you happiness outside of work, like exercise, creative pursuits or (socially distanced) time with friends.

You'll also want to make time for each other outside of the business, making sure you leave your phones on silent and table the business conversations. Time isn't the only thing you need to set boundaries with.

On the other hand, schedule time dedicated exclusively to discussing business. Regular check in meetings work well so that you're not forced to chat about business during off hours or around the dinner table. This also adds structure to the business and forces both of you to prepare your agenda, while enabling you to make sure your down time is really down time.

Key takeaways

Starting a business with your spouse has the potential to unlock incredible opportunities for your entrepreneurial journey, as you have someone you can trust next to you who is just as deeply invested in the business as you are. If treated as a professional partnership with established boundaries, ample communication and plenty of listening, operating your business with your spouse can be one of the best decisions for your business.



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