

A pleasure doing business with you

Communication and date nights key to survival say couple who work together

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You choose a life partner for the quirks and traits you love and admire, but could you also work with them day in and day out? Three couples who run successful businesses reveal the secrets to getting it right.

EMILY AND BRENDAN WILLIAMS
Established Chicane Marketing in 2002, together six years
As 20-somethings with no experience of the showbag industry, taking a tilt at this extremely niche market might seem overly bold and risky.

But with his experience in magazine sales and hers in marketing, Brendan, 36 and Emily, 35 knew they had the perfect skills set.

Ignoring the doubters, they ploughed ahead and are now top of the game — thanks to “persistence, good fortune and good timing.”

“We trusted each other implicitly from the word go,” says Brendan. “For us there was never a question of it not working,” adds Emily.

Having met as teens, their relationship became professional in their early 20s but love finally blossomed six years ago and they now have a daughter, Stella, 18 months.

“The flame was there for a while but we didn’t realise it,” Emily says with a laugh.

They credit much of their success to having similar personalities and an identical drive to achieve.

“We play with a straight bat... and we can rely on each other to perform.”

They have distinct responsibilities within the company but share the job of managing staff and clients.

From their separate glass offices in Alexandria they often schedule meetings via email and the odd disagreement is settled quickly.

“I just back down!” Brendan jokes. Family and couple time is priority.

“We’re careful to be home by 6pm — having (Stella) has helped us maintain balance.”

TIP: Our steadfast rule is we don’t talk about work before we go to bed.

ALISON AND BEN CLINCH
Founded The Free Range Butcher in 2008, together nine years
Poles apart in personality and professional approach, the Clinches agree it’s the differences that make them click but working together is not without its challenges.

“Ben is one of the most laidback people you could meet and I’m the opposite: highly strung, highly organised with strong attention to detail,” says Alison.

Ben: “I’ve learnt to take a back seat, let others fill in the details and take little steps — when all I want to do is take big steps and kick everything else out of the way!”

Ben ditched renovating bathrooms to realise his dream of bringing meat



Brendan and Emily Williams run Chicane Marketing. Picture: Sam Rutyn

produced on the family property at Barraba, in northern NSW, to farmers markets in Sydney. Five years on, business is booming and the Dee Why duo, who married in 2009, are parents to Tom, 4, and Georgia, 20 months.

Rapid growth has forced them to formalise their roles in the company — with a rule to never interfere.

Ben manages the operations, finance and sales while Alison handles all the marketing. Moving into dedicated premises helped to separate and better manage work-life balance.

“We have Family Fun Day Fridays where we put a ban on work phones and emails,” Emily says. “Every second Monday is date night because business takes so much of our life it’s easy for the relationship to suffer.”

TIP: Clearly set out your individual roles to clarify responsibilities and avoid confusion.

PAUL AND NAOMI WHITFIELD
Founded iKOU in 2008, together 22 years
“From the moment we met we started dreaming and scheming!” says Naomi, who was 18 when her matchmaking nan brought them together. Koen travellers and foodies, their passion for ethical values eventually led them to their brainchild, iKOU.



From their humble start in a kitchen and garage in Leura, their handmade ethically sourced and produced wares are now found in luxury hotels and spas worldwide.

The self-described dynamic duo and perfect-match say their skills make them “matching jigsaw pieces.”

Photographer and graphic designer Paul manages design and finance while Naomi is the “people person” directing staff, sales and PR.

Naomi: “Paul makes really quick decisions; he isn’t scared of change and taking risks whereas I tend to analyse and question every risk or better option before a decision.”

No work-life struggle for them.

“Our business is an extension of our lives. We live the life we promote of “rest, relax, restore” and make sure we get plenty of couple time,” says Naomi.

TIP: Friendship and love is the strongest foundation that makes you stick together through everything.

ASK THE EXPERT

Dr Greg Champan, small business adviser and author of *Married To The Business: Honey I Love You But Our Business Sucks*, says the biggest mistake for couples in business is being casual about delineating roles and setting up accountability systems — which can stifle growth. He says:

- Decide on the roles early;
- Have rules of engagement, eg, don’t criticise in front of staff;
- Create distance between business and personal;
- Have systems that allow you to take leave without shutting down.