

CHAPTER 3

What's Most Important?

"Happiness is the state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievement of one's values."

- Ayn Rand

Successful Couplepreneurs share values

Values

WHAT DO YOU STAND for? What are your principles? What are your core beliefs? What virtues do you aspire to? What will you not tolerate? What would you sacrifice for, suffer for, and even die for? The answers to these questions will reveal your values.

Your choices and decisions are based on your values. Whenever you have to make a decision, you will invariably choose the alternative that is in line with your values. When you are clear about what you value, then you can effectively plan and organize your life.

Values are difficult to define, but they are the foundational beliefs that anchor your life - the things that matter to you the most, the immutable characteristics that define your identity. Values comprise the core of

your being. Values are the basis of your character, actions, attitudes, ethics and personal beliefs.

How can you know what your values are? Simply observe your behavior, especially how you act under pressure. Your values are expressed in your actions. It is not what you say, wish, hope, or intend that expresses your true values. It is only *what you do*. Your choices and your subsequent actions demonstrate to you and others what is of greatest importance to you.

You reflect your true values in your daily life, but they blossom vividly in times of stress, crisis, or important decision-making. When you are “under the gun”, you respond with actions guided by your values.

Values-based business planning

Awareness of your values enables you to know what to do, and what not to do. You can take positions on issues, actively choose your policies, and evaluate your and others’ actions, beliefs, and attitudes.

Pat Hartwell and husband Rich have a strong foundation on which to grow their business, as is evident in the following statement. Pat states, “We do have a solid commitment to our relationship, and we have the same core values, guiding principles, and goals overall.”

Whether you’ve consciously identified your values or not, you always know deep down, when you’re not being true to yourself. You know the feeling: a vague sense of uneasiness and a tendency to

react defensively to stressful events. When you are aware of your values, you respond to stressful events with clarity, and you do it quickly. Being clear about your values helps you seek out people, and situations that support those values.

Jean: In building our rehabilitation company our strong values of service, loyalty, and family were always most important. Ours was a care-giving business so all of our employees, even office staff, had to truly care about people. I was in charge of staffing, and always sought out service-oriented employees. Our employees became part of our extended family, and we provided them many educational opportunities, and enjoyable social events. Our recognition of employee contributions and our consideration for them and their families became well known in our industry. We became employers of choice and retained our employees for unusually long times, some were with us for fifteen years. When we decided to sell the business, we looked very hard to find a buyer who would honor these values as well as retain our employees.

In order to build the business that is right for you, a business that you will be proud of, and that will enrich you, your relationship and the world, it is important to consistently demonstrate your values in all of the day to day decisions you make in your business. You *must* align your business goals and plans with your values. Your values should be apparent to your employees, customers, vendors, etc.

For example, Lynne and Bill Stender of 10-31 Industries prominently display their strong spiritual values - even in how they chose to name their business. From their website: "10-31 Inc. was founded on Christian ethical values and the name was chosen from a verse in 1: Corinthians 10-31 which states ...whatever you say or do, do all to the glory of God."

When your values and your business planning do not align, you will become frustrated and unhappy - even if the business is successful. John's story is an object lesson:

John was in charge of sales in the gourmet food company he and his wife owned. He had ambitious sales and acquisition goals that involved a great deal of traveling, with frequent weekends away from home. Although he was successfully meeting his goals, he was miserable. Why? He missed his family. He missed being with his wife, and sharing time with his two sons. He was away from home too much. When he realized this, he changed his traveling schedule so that he could be with his family every weekend, on holidays, and occasionally during the week. It meant working longer hours when he did travel, but that was okay. This change put his goals in line with his values, and both his business and family life flourished.

The following story illustrates how becoming Couplepreneurs in a business made a world of difference for one couple and their children.

For Linda, being a Couplepreneur and working with her husband would mean time together -- a rarity when she had to travel to make motivational speeches and he was working 50-hour weeks as a computer systems specialist. "One night I was looking at the Atlantic Ocean and he was looking at the Pacific Ocean and our children were with their grandparents in Kentucky," said Linda. "We thought, 'Is this any way to run a family?'" Now she joins her husband Bill in a converted garage behind their home to work together in their Promotional Product business. Even their two children pitch in, earning their allowances by licking envelopes. "It was the best thing we could have done," says Linda.

What if you have different values?

You probably relied heavily on your value system when you chose your life partner. It is critical that a couple have compatible goals and values for a successful partnership. The more you have in common, the less there is to argue about. However, you and your partner most likely don't share identical values.

A shared business life may highlight differences in values that were not obvious in your personal relationship. For example, what if partner A highly values quality and will not offer a product until they think it is perfect, yet partner B values high productivity and is resistant to delays? Partner B might criticize partner A for being a perfectionist, a procrastinator, or both. Partner A, on the other hand, might think partner B doesn't care about their company's reputation.

Values are subjective: they're just what's true for each person. Sometimes, when a value is important to you, it's troublesome when that principle doesn't matter as much to your partner. In the following story, Warren's goal of consistent productivity troubled Sharon, who placed more importance on her relationships with her customers.

Warren's wife, Sharon, owned an exclusive gift shop. Warren felt that his business expertise could be put to good use in Sharon's business. He convinced her, against her better judgment, that expanding the business would be beneficial for both of them. She agreed to go along with his ideas. They made plans together, expanded their inventory, hired several new employees, and it wasn't long before Warren started pressuring everyone to be more productive. Sharon began to hate going to work. She had loved the personal contact with her customers, but now she spent most of her time at work managing the employees and trying to keep Warren calm. They eventually decided that it would be better for Warren to pursue other opportunities and leave Sharon's business, which he did, which was the best decision for their relationship.

Values and Mission

Our values call us to a particular path in life, often perceived as our mission. A mission often brings meaning to our lives. When we use our unique skills, talents and desires in work that is meaningful and satisfying, we fulfill our mission. In their book, *The New Couple*, Maurice Taylor and Seana McGee intro-

duce “The Ten New Laws of Love.” They state, “The eighth law, mission in life, represents our commitment to discover and fulfill our life purpose - our ultimate and exalted adult job - and to make sure our partner does too.”

A meaningful mission in life can be a great organizing theme for a couple. However, most people have no idea what is their mission in life. The term “mission” is not part of the average person’s or couple’s vocabulary. It is the rare couple that is comprised of two partners who know what their purposes in life are and also know how to integrate them so that each fulfills their mission. In order to build a business together, couples must know each other’s values and mission, and create a plan that honors both. Taylor and McGee state, “Increasing numbers of can-do couples...have successfully managed to hitch themselves, side by side, to their stars...they’re daring to create within their relationship the right circumstances in which each partner can incubate his and her dreams - and make them happen.

Pat Hartwell: “We both had different businesses at first, and realized that although we provided different services, we were both offering education and support to business owners. We combined our services and now offer a more integrated and valuable service package. We are both on a mission to support and strengthen small businesses.”

Respect each other’s values and mission

Style and behaviors are negotiable, values are not. Even though you probably won’t change each other’s

values, there must be mutual respect for them. Respect is at the heart of building any relationship. It is the glue that holds together partnerships, teams, and organizations. Respect leads to accepting a person for what he/she is – epitomized by their core values. Accepting a person as they are creates trust. Trust often leads to new opportunities, new collaborations, new strategies, new ideas, and new products.

By being open about what *you* value and honoring *each other's* values and mission in life, you can agree upon a mutually beneficial mission for your business. You will then be able to plan and set priorities for your business that will further your individual missions in life.

Couplepreneur Coaching

Base all priorities on shared values.

Write your answers to the following questions in your Couplepreneur Journal:

1. What would you do even if you didn't have to?
2. What are you naturally attracted to?
3. What turns you on?
4. Think about those times in your personal life when you were really excited and felt terrific. What values were honored by these experiences?
5. Think about those times in your business when you were really excited and felt terrific. What values were honored by these experiences?
6. What, to you, are the *most important* elements for your life, family, relationships?

Compare answers with your partner.

Are your most important values compatible?

Do you understand and respect each others' values?

Are business priorities established by considering *both* partners' values?

Remember:

The closer your business satisfies your most important shared values, the more prosperous you will be!

Your values determine your tolerance for risk. In the next chapter, you will see how important it is to agree on a mutually acceptable level of risk in your business.