

MY TURN

By Elise Martos, M.A.

Courtesy Elise Martos.



TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

Seven Reflections on
Working With Your Spouse

When I joined Martos Engineering last year as its director of marketing and communications, I did so with an overwhelming sense of ambivalence, but also pure exhilaration. It wasn't the job that brought these emotions out. It was the fact that I would be working alongside my husband, Christian, in the firm that he started.

Christian and I have known each other for 15 years, been married for eight, and worked together for five years in another A/E firm. I was in marketing and he was a structural engineer. After a two-year respite, we'll be carpooling to work once again. People so often say to me, "How can you work with your husband?" For all of you who might also have the same question, I thought I'd give you some insight. Since I've been down this road before, I have enough perspective to confidently answer with the following observations and advice.

1. You can connect with your spouse unlike any other coworker.

Understanding your coworkers' thought processes and decision-making tactics is a critical element in any harmonious professional relationship. Using your personal history and marital intuition towards business objectives can give you an unanticipated edge in any competitive marketplace.

2. Ultimately, your spouse's successes will be your own.

The excitement you share in advancing your own career, while simultaneously rooting for your spouse's career goals, will eventually benefit the marriage in a way that can't be done when you work for separate companies. A new client signing, a successful proposal, or increased earnings feel great; but sharing these successes that impact both of you is especially rewarding.

Aligning your business values is similar to aligning your life and family values. And remember that it's important to appreciate each other's achievements without losing sight of your own.

3. Leave work at work.

The lines are quick to blur when professionally collaborating with a spouse. Many times in the past, we would lie in bed and recount a client email from the day or an altercation with a co-worker. Although sometimes necessary, that's dangerous territory. Your home is a place of refuge from the world. It's where you get to be yourself, not your professional persona. Keeping a list of items you want to discuss with your spouse at work the next day keeps the information memorable, while preserving and respecting your home life.

4. Respect your coworkers' and/or employees' perspectives.

You and your spouse may have accepted—and embraced—the working relationship, but this doesn't mean that others are as comfortable with it. Tone down any physical displays of affection in the workplace. It's not professional and you open yourself and your spouse up to criticism. Also, carefully consider your conversations. Nothing will alienate an employee or coworker faster than excluding them from business decisions that were made outside of the office. It's unfair to all parties involved.

5. Make your identity clear to clients and colleagues.

There's no shame in working with your spouse. Don't go out of your way to hide the fact. It's 2018. There are thousands of startups emerging monthly in the United States, with many of those being marital teams. You may interact both socially and

professionally with spouses. It's allowed, encouraged, and required for good business. Don't let your professional worth be devalued because you're in a business with your spouse. You set your own standards for how the relationship will be viewed—and you should set them high.

6. You are not the only married couple that has professionally collaborated together.

A few well-known couples include Microsoft's Bill and Melinda Gates, the late architecture critic and architect Aline and Eero Saarinen, Eventbrite's Kevin and Julia Hartz, Sugar Inc.'s Brian and Lisa Sugar, and Modcloth's Eric and Susan Koger. Their industries may vary, but their joint successes remain constant. Aline and Eero were so in sync, they shared a joint signature, "AE." It was either "E of AE" or "A of AE," connecting the couple at all times.

7. Be grateful for the opportunity that many may never have.

The fact that you and your spouse work within the same industry or profession is an incredible thing. With an average American work week being 34.4 hours, isn't it worth spending more of those hours with your spouse? Finding a way to financially accomplish such a task is truly a reason to rejoice. So go ahead, professionally collaborate with the most solid foundation there is ... *love*. ■