

# BALANCE

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## Entrepreneurs: You gotta love 'em!

As a therapist who specializes in working with couples, I always feel honored when clients come to me with a desire and commitment to save their relationship. When I began to work with entrepreneurs individually, and then together with their spouses, I thought it would be similar to working with non-entrepreneurial couples. However, the more I worked with entrepreneurs, the more fascinated I became about how the characteristics they possess make them successful both in business and in love. Entrepreneurs who are happily in-love or married report an improved sense of self-esteem in their businesses and positive financial impacts. This is all very interesting to me professionally, but working with entrepreneurs goes further than my office because I am in a relationship with an entrepreneur. It certainly adds an interesting dimension to love!

### AS THE SPOUSE OF AN ENTREPRENEUR,

I experience both the highs and lows of this dynamic individual and our dance through life together. I can be at times awed by his ability to create something out of nothing and his "never say die" attitude, and then exasperated by his disinterest in paying bills or not being able to finish one task before he is on to the next one. I cannot begin to tell you how many times I have nagged him to "just sit still" or asked him "can't we just lead a normal existence?". From his standpoint, he cannot fathom why it was so hard for me to start my own private practice, or how frustrated I get when he tells me to "stop worrying about things, because it will all work out". When we say these things to each other, we get hurt and become defensive. We catch ourselves and realize what we are doing to each other's spirit and to our relationship. Conflict is growth trying to happen.

The definition of "entrepreneurship" most often used in literature is "the process of creating or seizing an opportunity and pursuing it regardless of the resources currently controlled". Many people would often not see an opportunity or would shy away if all the factors weren't already in place to ensure success. So what makes an entrepreneur seize that opportunity? Entrepreneurs are known to be committed and determined and rarely let an opportunity go by without contemplation of its potential. They have a high tolerance for risk and can move forward in the face of uncertainty. Entrepreneurs are creative and able to adapt to various situations regardless of the challenges they may present. They are motivated, high achievers who are excellent in developing relationships that will assist their business ventures. But these characteristics that make an entrepreneur successful in business can be a double-edged sword when it comes to cultivating a loving relationship. The motivation to excel can take away from family time, and the time and energy dedicated to developing business relationships can deplete the time and energy needed in the romantic relationship.



**PERHAPS I CAN HELP?** Entrepreneurs (individually or with their spouses) come to me because they are struggling in their personal relationship, and they realize that this negatively impacts their business. Or, single entrepreneurs seek my help when they realize their lack of a love relationship creates an imbalance in their lives. Perhaps, I can help them achieve and maintain a healthy relationship.

Entrepreneurs seem "larger than life" to some, and in a relationship they tend to run the show. While both people in a relationship will feel a sense of entitlement to being heard and having their needs met, it is usually the entrepreneur that can "sell" their position more effectively. They do it for a living, so we shouldn't be surprised! In my work with couples, I teach them that when people are hurting in a relationship, they become self-absorbed and lose their sense of empathic connection. They become symbiotic, meaning that they only see the world one way, their way. There's a saying that goes "you and I are one, dear, and I am the one!" One of the ways to break this cycle of symbiosis is to learn new ways to communicate and re-imagine, re-structure, re-romanticize, and re-vision the relationship.

Let us not forget the equally important spouse of the entrepreneur (I'll remind you that I'm one of them!). The spouse often brings to the table characteristics that the entrepreneur is not good at. They may be pragmatic, financial budgeters, logical, detail-oriented, and structured. Unfortunately, the challenge that spouses of entrepreneurs may face is losing sight of their own identity and passion as the focus revolves around the entrepreneur and their business.

In any relationship, and especially the entrepreneurial one, couples must learn that there is an agenda hidden behind their attraction to one another. Developing an awareness of this hidden agenda and how to transform your relationship is the key to relaxed joyfulness. I am always amazed when clients come to me embarrassed and discouraged that they haven't been able to make their relationship work on their own, and again this is especially true for entrepreneurs who don't like to fail at anything. The thing that amazes me is why they think they should have been able to in the first place. Living with another person is the hardest thing we all will ever do, and for which we are the most ill-prepared.

Through childhood we develop ways to express and defend ourselves. As adults, we then become attracted to a person who wants us to do things differently. Have you ever heard "I wish you would stop nagging me" or "why won't you tell me what you're feeling?". A person's childhood defenses are brilliant, but they are no longer useful in adult relationships, yet we still use them when we are feeling attacked. Our behaviors then manifest into the power struggle of the relationship. We unintentionally trigger each other into emotional reactions that have little to do with the current issue being argued over. The issue then gets blown out of proportion and we are left feeling confused, hurt, and very lonely. How many times have we argued over the same issue with our partners, over and over again, hoping for a different outcome? When we remain unaware of the hidden agenda of romantic love, we will continue to repeat our mistakes. This process of learning and growing in your relationship is called Imago Therapy. Imago Therapy seeks to make sense of the nature of adult committed relationships and helps us get the love that we want.

**THE BAD NEWS?** We create our own nightmare.

**THE GOOD NEWS?** We create our own pleasant dreams too! This means that we all have it within ourselves to change what we think are negative aspects of our relationship into positive ones. If your partner doesn't have the capacity to drive you completely crazy, they probably also lack the ability to make you deliriously happy.

What I have come to expect from and appreciate about entrepreneurs is that the characteristics they possess make them superb clients. Their willingness to acknowledge their circumstances, enlist help, and do the work needed to change what isn't working is fundamental for success in any kind of therapy. Entrepreneurs and their spouses have phenomenal potential for an enriching, joyful, passionate relationship, which will lead to increased business and financial success. My partner and I work on our relationship constantly. We each have the ability to help the other grow and meet each other's needs. The result of our work and commitment to this process is a conscious relationship that I love to describe as "alive." **NOW, IF ONLY I COULD GET HIM TO TAKE OUT THE TRASH...** 



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