

Utilization of Business Skills In the Building of a Successful Marriage

Feiice Dunas, Ph.D.
info@felicedunas.com

I hope you find this information and perspective valuable!

Because a happy marriage is challenging to achieve and maintain, it is wise to consider the strategies you already use to generate success in other areas of life, especially business, and adapt them to help your marriage thrive. This class will introduce you to many of the similarities between the two seemingly diverse areas of life and show you how implementing the protocols of one will enhance the other.

How is your marriage like a business?

1. Marriage is based upon legally bound, contractual agreements as laid out, generally, in the marriage vows and licenses. Some religions go further, establishing at the wedding the contractual terms should the couple divorce and how the wife and children will be supported. The modern pre-nuptial agreement is another example of this.
2. It serves as the foundation for economic growth and development for both parties
3. Marriage is a long term, multi-armed project that must first achieve high functionality and then remain highly functional in many areas. It requires an ever-evolving, complex set of skills including: communication, management, prioritization, budgeting of resources (time, energy, money, sex, attention), boundary setting, goal establishment and re-assessment, etc.
4. It has goals". These are used as the criteria for choosing a spouse and later become the cornerstone upon which post-wedding decisions are based. Every one who marries has agendas (short and long term) as to what they want their future life to look like.
5. Society judges you by your success in your marriage/family just as society judges you by your success in business.

How is your marriage NOT like a business?

1. There are fewer educational opportunities to learn how to build marriage successfully. There are no educational institutions providing official training for this important endeavor. Approximately 80% of people come from "dysfunctional" families so experiential sources from our own childhoods are not viable resources for teaching the most effective skills sets.
2. In fact, There are still negative social stigmas on getting marital education/ support whereas business support is institutionalized and recognized as

imperative for the growth of a company. If feeling the need for marital support, the tendency is to think something is wrong with who you are, whereas, business support is respected and brought in when a need for enhanced skill is required.

3. Being effective in the achievement of marital wealth tends to be valued as more prestigious than maintaining marital health. Marriage gets your worst hours of the day, when you are tired.
4. CEO and the COO have not had extensive training to assume the position and may not be as effective or as respected as necessary.

Business Plans, Mission and Vision Statements

At the foundation of every successful business is; a vision statement that clarifies why the company exists, a mission statement as to where you are taking it and a business plan that outlines how you are going to get there. It takes a great deal of thought to arrive at the final statements but the effort is required for all future success. Is there a comparable framework for your marriage and family? While global concepts such as “to honor and obey in sickness and in health” are laid out during the marriage ceremony, and pre-marital counseling is now becoming a church-sponsored product, few couples regularly sit down together to specify what they each want to get out of their life together, how they intend to do this, and what kind of help they need from each other to accomplish their goals.

Do you have a picture in mind or what you want out of your marriage, of how you want to feel when you are interacting with your spouse? Has it been discussed or just assumed? When was the last time you and your spouse wrote down your interpersonal goals as well as your methods for achieving them?

There are many resources discussing Family Mission and Vision statements. Dr Stephen Covey has some examples in his books and the internet is filled with websites teaching how to create these important documents.

Unfortunately, the lack of education with which most of us approach spousal choice leads to 75% of the divorces in the U.S. today. Spousal choice related divorces are caused by problems that existed on the wedding day and generally cause the demise of a marriage within 15 years. The other 25% are the result of poor marital education, skill customization, implementation and updating [given that most of your audience is already married... they can only improve on this 25%?? Actually, some are again single so the full 100% applies to them]. Because proper marital education is hard to come by, it has become acceptable to maintain lower standards in marriage than either party ideally wants. In many YPO families, mediocre marriage becomes tolerable for decades as the company and the kids develop to maturity. These marriages face a rude awakening and either get to work on very old issues, i.e. updating from decades of neglect all at once (which is not fun) or end in divorce as the company gets sold or the kids leave home.

Every company works with a very specific set of metrics by which success is measured. Sometimes success is cash flow based, sometimes market share. But every business has systems/structure/intentionality in place to drive its success. To raise your level of marital bliss, consider using the same methods your business uses. Determine your measures of success and be intentional about achieving it.

Job descriptions and Power Hierarchies: No one is ever hired for "no good reason". Every one is brought in for a specific purpose. Do all your family members know their job descriptions in reference to family/marital functioning? In my work with couples, most family members appear at least partially unclear as to their job description and position in reference to distribution of power, the power hierarchy, if you will and role definition. This creates a tremendous amount of unnecessary stress. For example, some men prefer having minimal home responsibility because they bring in money, which facilitates everything in the family lifestyle. This requires so much of their time that they want to minimize duties at home. If wives can agree to this arrangement and all are comfortable, this viewpoint may not be problematic. Unfortunately, these same men can get critical of how things are done at home. When busy with work, they can avoid the frustration they feel. Then, when the family is all together for an extended period of time, during a weekend or on vacation, they may suddenly take charge of something that is usually her domain [this is a really good example!]. They will change roles with out prior discussion and will work to improve things with their own methods, overpowering current protocols and upsetting their wives, kids or both. Because nothing has been put in writing to state what their roles are, this messy situation can result in anger and frustration for every one. Men may feel their contributions are not wanted, wives feel disrespected and the kids get confused and resentful. Another example would be a wife asking her husband to complete a task for her in reference to the household. This is not a problem unless she micromanages her husband, telling him how to complete that task, which, makes him entirely disinterested in doing so. If a couple has pre-established that she may request of him but not control his method, every one is happier.

At work, delegation of responsibility, i.e. who does what, is clearer than at home. I suggest you establish clarity around roles at home. Create a contract as to who does what and who is in charge of what. If both spouses think they are both responsible for the same task, they get in each others way

Create a Team

Being the boss means nobody is your equal. You have solo responsibility at work for the decisions you make and you give the final word on many verdicts no matter the opposition's point of view. While spouses function independently and rule their domains autonomously, when you are together there must be a team concept. At work your word goes. At home, that isn't necessarily the case. This can be challenging for two natural leaders.

Many team oriented business skills can be brought home. Knowing how to listen and understand is imperative in both settings.

But the buck must always stop with some one in life. The house is a “stay at home” wife’s office. She is usually the mutually appointed COO and probably the CEO of the home and the marriage. Is this the case in your household? Or would this statement be considered true except for certain situations or areas? [these are good questions to get the audience thinking]

A man is on the team but he is generally not the boss. It may be helpful to consider him as a department head, running certain areas of the marriage and household as he sees fit with the understanding that the results need to meet family or marital needs. Frank is in charge of home maintenance and repair. He is the primary chef in the house and makes sure to do the math and science homework with the kids before he draws Eileen’s bath at night, (a gesture that makes them both feel closer at the end of the day). He also chooses the location for their date night each week and surprises his wife with his creative choices. Eileen is responsible for the children’s maintenance, garden and vacation planning. She researches interesting subjects each week to share with her husband so they have something fun and different to speak about during their date night. They both enjoy decorating their home so that is a joint department. This departmental breakdown evolved organically out of Frank and Eileen’s interests and abilities. They used their natural strengths to determine which jobs are theirs.

Rules exist in home and marriage but there is often no clear, stated agreement. While duties and jurisdictions are outlined at work, the home structure is less defined. Because rules are unspoken, it is easy to break them. One party or the other can break them without feeling guilty about doing so because they were never stated in the first place. But unstated guidelines are just as upsetting to live with when broken as stated ones. Written guidelines determining positions will create more harmony at home.

A typical challenge that many YPOers run into is the CEOs travel schedule. Does your spouse feel ok with your schedule? Have you ever discussed what her/his comfort zone is and, to take that a step further, have you ever built your schedule within that comfort zone? How can you compensate for the travel schedule that challenges family and marital intimacy? What strategically can be done to compensate for that? The Wal-Mart Empire was built with two basic guidelines. The founder was never going to move his wife and kids to a town of more than 10,000 people and he had to be home by 6:00 for dinner each night. With those clear cut guidelines, the largest retailer in the US was effectively built. Sometimes limitations pave the way for greatness.

Hours of Operation – There are common sense baselines in the business world. For example, you don’t schedule an important management meeting for 5pm on Friday afternoon. Doing so would infringe upon the private time of your staff and would be

highly ineffectual because every one is tired from the week. Saving that meeting until Monday morning will be a better option.

Unfortunately, couples don't think this way in reference to their important meetings. For example, why would you have sex, a very sacred act that would best serve your marriage were it a "love making session" at 10:30 at night when you are both exhausted? One YPO couple I have worked with made love every morning before work, around 5am, before the kids were born. Now, with three children under five, she is simply too tired to enjoy this routine. But, rain or shine, her husband still expects the routine to continue, even though she dreads it and he hates inflicting himself upon her. They just haven't come up with another option. They have not updated their sex life to fit the rest of life. Now a loving exchange that once meant so much is ripe with negative feelings.

Why have a conflict resolution session late at night when you are irritable and your tempers are short from fatigue? Most important business activities are scheduled when attendees are fresh can get the most out of them and have the most to contribute. If you are only going to make love and resolve intimacy related issues with one person in your life, wouldn't you want each experience to reflect the value you give that relationship?

Her Job

Wives often become COO and CEO of a marriage or family by default. It's a very difficult and complex job; it takes a tremendous amount of time and can be all the more difficult because much of it is not intellectually stimulating. Most husbands have no idea how complex this position is and do not give a woman full credit for her efforts and results. A woman is thrown into this position without fully realizing its complexity and without sufficient training. She hasn't worked her way up from the mailroom.

During the early years of marriage a woman without sufficient leadership training may not "lead" her husband well. Women may nag, nit pick or boss their husbands into performing necessary tasks. Husbands, who come from CEO positions, aren't comfortable with subservience or poor leadership. They spend all day motivating and inspiring people, empowering them to be their best and to accomplish necessary tasks. They probably received formal training in this area through an MBA or mentorship and would love to teach their wives what they know. A woman could learn a great deal from her husband re how to lead a team. Were she to ask, he could provide a wealth of information enhancing her success with him, the children and household staff. Husbands with leadership skills can offer brilliant insights into the management of home, time and family.

But when a woman over controls because she is too stressed out, she is not going to win allegiance from him. For example, Graig says his wife is more than welcome to ask him to do something for her or the family. But, he repeatedly reminds her, "Tell me what you want but don't tell me how to do it. Don't micromanage. I can figure out how to get

things done my own way.” A woman inadvertently turns her husband into her “other” child when she over controls.

Many women would love to let go of some of the control they exert over the family but feel they can't because their husbands don't have the depth of resource, the know how, to take over if need be. As a result, women may feel irritable, trapped and without other options. This cuts them off from their softness and femininity and can be very harmful to their marriages. It may take a dramatic turn of events, such as a disease or the threat of an affair, to give a woman the impetus to take better care of herself by running her life more effectively and delegating work out to her husband, staff, children or friends.

One very complex skill set that CEO husbands can help with is the hiring of help. Hiring is an art and the staff brought in to support the family must be an excellent fit. Graig told me that he wants his au pair to be the happiest employee they have because she takes care of the children. This means they must choose the right person and then manage her well. As he and his wife run their company together and are both skilled at hiring, these two do well with finding and managing domestic staff. But not all couples are as skilled. Julie insisted on hiring their household nanny. Over a very frustrating two year period she hired five different women who filled the position for the range of six week to nine months. Her management skills were so low that all five of these women took advantage of their position and of Julie's tolerance. Jay, Julie's husband was extremely frustrated with this arrangement. His wife had given him explicit instructions not to intrude on her employee relationships, not to disrupt the development of her power as a boss with the nannies. But respecting his wife's wishes was difficult. It took her five failures and quite a few conversations with me for her to realize that her husband was brilliant at hiring personnel and that if he chose and managed the nanny, her life would be much easier and their marriage would be relieved of a tremendous strain.

Unfortunately, many men don't approach their wives with suggestions the way management approaches executives. If a husband viewed his role as that of consultant on the project of family-life development, he would present his ideas in a more effective way. He would be less dominating and authoritative because he wouldn't be representing himself as the boss, the family CEO, which he is not. Thus his ideas would be better received. You don't talk down to the family CEO if you want your ideas incorporated into the strategic plan.

Recognizing Your Spouse's Needs

Having worked with the spouses of many executives, I have heard many women say. “I am just the spouse, I am not the wage earner. He is the important one, he has the prestige and he makes the money”. They belittle themselves. If a woman has low self esteem, it makes her very complex job all the more difficult.

Many stay at home moms or working moms who are also CEO of the home and marriage are not recognized for their value either by themselves or their husbands. How many husbands have taken the time to consider the tremendous responsibility

their wives bear, and the detailed skill sets required to pull everything off successfully. Being a wife and mother is a hard job!

A man would never devalue any high level, hard to replace position in the company, even if he didn't know the full job description or the skills involved. Most men haven't acquired the skills to do what their wives do. The marriage and family is going to fall apart if the spouse isn't competent.

According to Jeffrey, a CEO and veteran of 24 years of marriage, "CEOs tend to be more visionary and less logistical in their thinking processes. Home is more management oriented and harder for entrepreneurs to govern or organize. Home long term care is a COOs job and not an entrepreneur's job." Does she really want to be both CEO and COO? Is that the only possible arrangement for your household? If she is unhappy, everybody is going to be unhappy.

But women also unwittingly belittle their husbands. They forget to recognize his need for peace and regenerating time after the long work day or work trip. Home is where he lets down, where he recovers. A good CEO recognizes that every manager, no matter how competent, needs a place to come home to that offers quiet, solace and nourishment. Do you know what nourishment means for your husband? Have you made that a priority in his time with you?

Energy Driven / Results Driven

During the typical Annual Review of employees, what do you measure? According to William, CEO and founder of the largest US wholesale business in his industry, you measure effort not results. "Sometimes the results you are shooting for come and sometimes they don't. I evaluate based on the effort an employee puts out as well as results. Maybe some one doesn't get results because they were matched up with the wrong task. Were they provided with the tools to be successful? Do they have the skills to be successful? These are the two reasons my people don't achieve results at work. Provided the company has done a decent job equipping the employee, I am predominantly focused on results.

This is also a healthy standard for assessing behavior in your kids and spouse. In a work environment we measure how some one improved and how much effort they put in. Unfortunately, school is almost entirely results driven and our kids are held to difficult achievement standards that have nothing to do with their natural proclivities and abilities. Learning why a spouse doesn't complete a task may provide more information to support intimacy between you than had they completed it. Be watchful of this. Measuring effort, energy and intent along with results is a much healthier gauge than measuring results alone.

Remedies

There are many similarities between the running of a business and the running of a marriage and home life. While both are complex social and economic machines, we tend to view and run them with different skill sets, to our detriment. By bringing business skills home you will create dramatic changes in the success you achieve in your personal lives. Here are some take-home suggestions for enhancing your life.

1. **Create your Marriage and Family Vision and Mission Statements: Formulate a Business Plan** and have regular periods throughout the year when you monitor how well you are staying on task.

2. **Clearly define your roles**, your job descriptions. Once you define who runs what, put your agreement in writing to help you stay within the confines of those roles. Do not usurp power or step on each other's toes. This will help with the team concept you are building and enhance your bonding as a couple.

3. **Use each other's skills:** Women who run households would gain tremendous knowledge if they asked their husbands for leadership advice. CEO's know how to empower people, keep them on task and get results in an organized fashion. Likewise, the statement "Behind every great man is a great woman" was borne from the understanding that a woman's support, no matter her degree of involvement in the business world, is a priceless tool for any man attempting to manifest his full potential. Your combined skills are precious for growing a healthy marriage, family and company. Look at your own skill sets and determine what you have to offer your partner. If you are both open-minded enough to accept loving suggestions, the benefits can be life long.

4. **Cultivate Empathy:** A man benefits by learning what it takes for a woman to run the house. It would help him feel the gratitude and appreciation for his wife that makes life rich. Ladies, consider leaving town for several days, without hiring additional help. This would give your husband the opportunity to find out what your world is like. By allowing him to be family CEO and COO for awhile so he realizes the scope of your expertise. Likewise, it is wise for a woman to drop her schedule and adopt his for a few days in a row. Find out what his world is like first hand by trailing him. Discover what puts the fatigue on his face at the end of the day. What burdens is he carrying, what responsibility is he feeling? The two of you will grow closer as a result.

5. **Get Help!** It is as foolish to run a marriage with out specialists and consultants as it is to run a company without them. Both endeavors require multiple, complex skill sets. The social stigma associated with marital support is dissipating as our divorce rate remains high, desperate couples realize it takes skills to make marriages work and specialists can educate in those skills. A fruitful marriage, like a prospering company, can resolve conflicts and move ahead more effectively with the quality support of experts.

6, Prioritize and Restructure Your Time: Create special time for yourselves. Your dating life was all about being together and enjoying each other. Your married life is more focused on the logistics of running your lives. Have a regular date night to rekindle your personal connection. If you did not talk about kids, money or work, do you have anything to say? If not, your marriage needs to be updated. Also, when you have important discussions and when you make love, set time aside. Good things must be prioritized if they are to reap you the rewards you want.