

## **Healthy Partnerships Require Good Management**

A business partnership, like a marriage, will have its ups and downs. We have all heard the old saying, "opposites attract." This is true. We tend to be subconsciously attracted to individuals who possess personality traits opposite our own. For this reason, it is common to find partners who are very opposite in thinking, social and behavioral styles. For example, one partner may be persistent, introverted and highly dependable, while the other tends to be easy going, laid back and socially bold. One partner is always on time and attending to details, while the other may be chronically late and lose track of details because their mind is always on the next big deal or project.

We tend to be subconsciously attracted to individuals opposite us thinking, social and behavioral styles, because at first these traits are exciting, stimulating and refreshing. Over time, however, they begin to produce stress as the newness of the relationship wears off and gives way to daily pressures. Those very traits, which were highly attractive, become frustrations and obstacles to growth. At this point, many partnerships break down under the stress.

Those who understand these underlying dynamics can and should expect significant interpersonal obstacles to begin surfacing any time after the first twelve months of the partnership. Obstacles generally present themselves as small irritations and then fester over time. As months, or even years go by, they can grow into major conflicts. Initial minor frustrations escalate into major differences of opinion regarding business policies and practices, and even the overall vision for the organization.

So, what can be done to keep partnerships on track and prevent unnecessary derailments? The best solutions are always proactive. Be willing to invest some time and resources in partnership/leadership coaching early on, before the minor irritabilities grow into major obstacles. One way to do this is for each partner to complete a personality/leadership profile assessment and sit down with a coach and review them together. (See our assessment tools on the website.) This allows you to gain insight into each other's personality styles, strengths and vulnerabilities. With these insights, you are in a position to address how you can deal with your differences in personality and style in such a way as to complement, rather than derail your partnership. I've had the opportunity to do such development coaching with small business owners and it is extremely powerful. As you can imagine, this type of coaching becomes all the more critical as the number of partners increase.

I once coached a seven-member partnership team. This was extremely challenging, yet as you might imagine, the outcomes were quite amazing as they grew in their abilities to understand each other's strengths as well as better tolerate one another's weaknesses and vulnerabilities.