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THE POWER OF ALIGNMENT:

Being Creative and Self-expressed Partners

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Being in Alignment as Partners

Webster's dictionary defines alignment as "the act of bringing into a straight line, to bring into close cooperation, to ally with, to associate with, or to side with."¹ Couples who see themselves as partners in life together tend to be aligned on their values, in their lifestyle, and in their vision for their relationship and their future. When something in their life together is not working or is creating a misalignment, partners will work together to resolve the issue to get back into alignment with each other. Being in alignment, like being in balance, is a truing mechanism for a couple that is committed to partnership.

Two people in a partnership stand powerfully and freely side by side in life. In giving advice on marriage, the Prophet by Kahlil Gibran said "And stand together, yet not too near together: For the pillars of the temple stand apart, and the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow."² Like two pillars, partners stand side by side, aligned and committed to the quality of their relationship.

This paper identifies five distinct areas of life where being in alignment can make a big difference for any couple that is committed to having a creative and self-expressed partnership. Those five areas include the perspectives they share with respect to each other and their relationship, the values they share in their lives together, the vision they have for their relationship in the world, the future they visualize for their life together and the projects and committed action to which they commit to realize their dreams. Being in alignment in these five areas of your life can give you and your partner access to the shared experience of possibility, partnership and passion for living.

¹ Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition. (1957)
New York: The World Publishing Company.

² Gibran, K. (1923) *The Prophet*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Publishers

Align on Perspectives for Workability in Your Partnership

A perspective or point of view is your particular way of seeing or framing what happens in your life. There are a number of perspectives that can make a significant difference in the overall vitality of your partnership, if you both are in alignment with each other about them. There are three perspective outlined here that can positively impact the workability of your partnership.

First, adopt and align on the perspective that nothing is inherently wrong or needs to be fixed with either of you or your relationship. Actively embrace the perspective that each of you and your relationship are naturally “creative, resourceful, and whole.”³ Inside of this perspective, you both, as partners, can be resourceful, imaginative, competent, effective and enterprising in dealing with your circumstances in life. It is a perspective from which you can create your lives and to which you can always return when something in your lives is not working as well as you would like it to. With this perspective, you can powerfully focus on an issue you are dealing with and can avoid assessing weaknesses in yourselves or in your relationship.

Second, adopt the framework that each of you are responsible for your own happiness but not that of your partner. Responsibility in this framework is the act of owning your own happiness and creating your responsibility for it by saying: “I am completely and solely responsible for my happiness. And while I am not responsible for my partner’s happiness, I am committed to it.” The corollary to this is also very powerful: Each of you is responsible for your own unhappiness and not responsible for your partner’s unhappiness. This clear understanding of responsibility, together with a commitment to each other’s happiness, can be an extraordinary foundation of workability in your partnership.

Finally, adopt the perspective that, for your relationship to work, it must work for both of you. A partnership can only be a partnership when it is collaborative and a “win” for both of you and for your relationship. Many couples early in their relationship set up a model of responsibility that could be called 50% – 50%. In other words, if each person in the partnership does their 50%, then all 100% of what needs to be done gets accomplished and presumably both partners will be happy and satisfied. The problem is that this 50% – 50% model is insufficient to creating real partnership. As soon as one person does not do “their” 50% in the relationship, the other person may experience a sense of unfairness, of inequity, and of being taken advantage of. It is a model that is based on what each person is doing in a relationship, rather than based on who each person is being for the relationship.

The more important question becomes, who is ultimately responsible for the workability of the relationship as a whole? You both are. Commit yourselves to each of you being 100% responsible for the workability of your committed relationship. Adopt a model of

³ Holding another person as “creative, resourceful and whole” is a central cornerstone of the model of co-active coaching, a paradigm of professional coaching developed by Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl (1998) in their book, *Co-active coaching: New skills for coaching people towards success in work and in life*, Palo Alto, California: Davies-Black Publishing.

100% – 100% responsibility in your relationship. Each of you is responsible for and can be committed to the whole relationship. When you and your partner are being naturally creative, resourceful, and whole, being 100% responsible for yourselves and your relationship and being committed to your partnership, you are powerfully aligned for the workability of your partnership.

Align on the Values of your “Couple-ness”

The values you and your partner share can be seen as intrinsic to your “couple-ness” and reflect the very heart and soul of your partnership. Some couples value mutual understanding, validation, communication, openness, compromise, and friendship. Other couples value the freedom to express different viewpoints, emotional expressiveness, and passion. Still other couples value minimizing conflict, sharing common ground, harmony and autonomy. Couples who co-create and align on their values can be very successful and fulfilled in their relationship over the long-term.⁴

Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl (1998) wrote that a valued life is a fulfilling life and living such a life is a “radical act.”⁵ When one thinks of the word “radical,” one thinks of going to an extreme, but this is not what is meant in this context. The dictionary definition of “radical,” as an adjective, is “of or from the root or roots, going to the center, foundation, or source of something,” such as a *radical* principle.⁶ When you and your partner are able to articulate and generate the core values in your relationship, you co-create the foundation of your relationship on an on-going basis. Your “couple-ness” contributes powerfully to other people in your lives. Your alignment of values contributes to everyone with whom you come in contact.

Align on the Vision of Your Partnership

Another area where you and your partner can be in alignment is in articulating a vision for your lives and your relationship. A vision for your partnership conveys what you want to express in the world as the fulfillment of your lives together. It is not just the achievement of life goals or objectives. A vision for your relationship represents what you stand side-by-side for in your family and in your community. A vision could be thought of as a co-created stand for the quality of your relationship and lifestyle that touches others around you. This quality of living is an expression of the your values and what you deem as important to your relationship.

To envision is “to picture in the mind or to imagine something not yet in existence.” Vision is often associated with organizational change. It is well recognized that a powerful vision is crucial to inspiring people and providing a direction and a mindset for success (Miser, 2006).⁷ Similarly, couples committed to partnership can co-envision the

⁴ Gottman, J. (1994). *Why marriages succeed or fail: And how you can make yours last*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁵ Whitworth, L., Kimsey-House, H, & Sandahl, P. (1998) *Co-active coaching: New skills for coaching people towards success in work and in life*. Palo Alto, California: Davies-Black Publishing.

⁶ *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition*. (1957) New York: The World Publishing Company.

⁷ Miser, M. (2006) *Vision: The engine of change*. Unpublished paper.

desired quality of their life together and, standing in that vision, can co-create their lives bringing that vision into reality.

Zander and Zander (2000) define “vision” in their book on personal and professional transformation, “The Art of Possibility,” as articulating possibility, fulfilling a fundamental desire of humankind, making no reference to morality or ethics, and being a freestanding and timeless picture.⁸ A vision co-created by a committed couple is their stand for the kind of contribution they committed to making as an expression of their partnership. An expression of such a vision might be “providing visionary, inspired leadership,” “living in the presence of wonderment, magic and mystery,” or “being self-expressed, magnificent and adventurous.” Co-creating and being aligned on a vision for being and contributing in your lives are powerful ways to have your partnership expressed in the world. Standing on that foundation, you and your partner can powerfully create your future.

Align on Visualizing Your Future

A fourth way you and your partner co-create your lives is through inventing a future for your partnership. To create the future, first anchor yourselves in what you value and in the vision you have for your relationship. Then, visualize and share with each other your dreams of your future, irrespective of time. As you share your vision of your future, step into those future images and experience what it is like having that future be real and manifested in the world. Where are you living? How does it feel for you both? What do you experience? What does it look like? What is it that lights you up about what you visualize? Examine all the areas of your life, such as your home, family, friends, community, work, career, retirement, play, recreation, and health.

As you stand in the future you are co-creating, you are using the same abilities that Merlin the Magician used as mentor to the great King Arthur of the Round Table. Merlin had an uncanny ability to see the future before it occurred. The process of standing together and visualizing images of the future gives you, as a couple, a magic wand like that of Merlin the Magician. The “Merlin Principle”⁹ applied to couples is the phenomenon of looking from the future to the present time which allows a couple to see, feel and sense their future in a clear and tangible way.

Once you share and experience your possible desired future together, you can choose and align on a timeframe for the manifestation of the future you have both co-created. You can choose a timeframe of 25, 15, 10, 5, or 2 years. Standing together in your co-invented future, you can view the path from the future to the present moment and see clearly what actions you took and what you accomplished along the way. You can also see when those actions and accomplishments occurred. Working from the future (say, 10 to 15 years out) to the present time, you can articulate, in a timeline, the milestones, accomplishments and the actions that naturally occurred on the path to your future.

Committing together to the future you have co-created is essential for expressing your partnership in action. Almost immediately after making this commitment to your future,

⁸ Zander, B., & Zander, R. S. (2000) *The art of possibility: Transforming professional and personal life*. Harvard Business School Press: Boston, Massachusetts.

⁹ Smith, C.E. *The Merlin Factor: Leadership and strategic intent*. Business Strategy Review, Oxford University Press, 5(1), Spring, 1994.

you will see a host of “partnership projects” needed to fulfill on the future you have envisioned. You will experience an alignment of focus and action when you undertake these partnership projects as an expression of your commitment to make manifest your future.

Align on Committed Action

Czeslaw Milosz said, “To undertake a project, as the word’s derivation indicates, means to cast an idea out ahead of itself so that it gains autonomy and is fulfilled not only by the originator, but, indeed, independently of him as well.”¹⁰ Partnership projects are distinct from the normal “routine” of life as they are co-created by the couple to bring their future into existence and co-owned for the duration of the project. Partnership projects can be created in any area of life, such as home improvement, financial well-being, children/family, career, education, community, or vacation and travel. Projects are designed to be time limited and have a specific measurable result.

After co-creating your future using the Merlin principle, you will find that many projects will start to appear on your joint “radar screen”. Within these projects, you and your partner can cooperate together in planned action and in co-owning your accomplishments, both the intended and the unintended outcomes. You can examine and acknowledge any disempowering perspectives you may have unwittingly adopted along the way as well as identify actions and accomplishments that you still need to take. By co-owning the results of your project(s), you are able to re-create your partnership and stay in action.

When co-creating projects and bringing them to fruition, you will find that there are several necessary steps to co-designing a successful partnership project. These include creating the future accomplishment of the partnership project, sharing any current perspectives and concerns that may be limiting the project outcomes, creating and choosing an empowering way of being for the project, defining the actions necessary to fulfill the partnership project and putting them into time. It is also works and is fun to name the project. You will also discover that, throughout the life of your project(s), you must meet periodically so you can evaluate the results of your actions, plan the next steps of their projects and be in alignment on a regular basis.

Make Being in Alignment a Practice

Find the space and time to regularly share with each other and be in alignment with respect to your values, your perspectives around the workability of your partnership, the vision you have for your relationship, what you envision for your future and the action you are committed to take together to fulfill your dreams.

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