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VISUALIZE THE FUTURE TOGETHER:

Use the Merlín Principle!

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Vision: The Possibility of Partnership

An important area of life in which committed couples can connect powerfully with each other is creating a vision for their lives and their relationship. A vision for one's relationship represents what a couple stands for together in the world. It is not just the achievement of life goals or objectives. A vision could be thought of as a co-created stand for the quality of life that expresses the couple's core values and that moves and touches people who know them.

To envision is "to picture in the mind or to imagine something not yet in existence" (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1957). Creating a vision is most often associated with organizational change. It is well recognized that a powerful vision is crucial to inspiring and motivating people and providing a direction and a mindset for success (Miser, 2006). Similarly, partners in a marriage or in a committed relationship can co-envision the desired quality of their life together and can work together to bring that vision into reality. When thinking about a married couple on their journey together over the course of their life span, it is easy to see the importance of being able to create a vision for partnership on a renewable and periodic basis.

Martha Miser (2006) articulates the six "Golden Rules" of vision that hold as true for a committed couple or a "partnership of two," as they do for multinational corporations. These "Golden Rules" are:

- A vision is purposely and consciously created by the couple
- A vision is a flexible and dynamic process
- A vision is about greatness
- A vision is both future focused and grounded in reality
- A vision does not tell the couple how to get there
- A successful vision is shared by the couple

Zander and Zander (2000) distinguish "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. A couple's vision represents their stand for the kind of world they want to manifest as an expression of their partnership.

Creating a Vision for the Partnership

You and your partner can create a vision of your partnership in a fun and creative way by creating a picture collage that express what you both stand for and the kind of world you wish to create. It takes an hour or two to accomplish this.

First, to create a collage, all you need is a piece of large poster board, scissors, a glue stick and a number of magazines. You can also use any other materials you wish, such as personal pictures, crayons, markers, etc., to construct your collage. Sit together around a table where you can work in partnership. Start by each of you tearing out pictures from magazines that depict images that represent world you are standing for. Tear out between 20 and 25 pictures apiece.

Then, after you each have your pictures, spend some time, sharing back and forth why each picture calls to you. What does each picture represent to you for your relationship? You can write down key words (or values) that you share with each other.

Next, work together to create your collage. Together, choose the pictures you both want to include in your collage. Trim the pictures the way you want them. You can first lay all your pictures out on the poster board or you can create the collage as you go. Paste the pictures onto the poster board. Lastly, you can write the words on the collage itself or on the back of the poster board. Place your collage in a prominent location in your home.

If you wish you can create a Vision Statement for your partnership using the words that you shared together.

- What is your vision of your life together?
- What possibilities do you both see?
- What is your marriage and/or committed relationship creating and expressing in the world?

In 2006, my wife, Martha and I, were moving from The Netherlands to Boston, Massachusetts, after living abroad for four years. We sat together one afternoon and created the following vision for our lives and for our partnership, which we entitled "Our World."

Does not get better than this
Having space in our lives
Fantasy, fun, and playfulness
Music and joy
Relaxation and being together in exotic places
Beauty in nature
Adventure and travel
Learning from history
Social justice
Being an observer, all seeing
The realities of the world
That part of the world we do not know

Mystery
Anchoring our Dutch experience
Remembering
Greatness and inspiration
Wisdom
Oma and Opa
There is no place like home

We were headed home to Boston to be closer to our family, particularly our new grandson, Brody, who was barely 6 months old. We had adopted the names, Opa and Oma, which are common Dutch names for grandfather and grandmother. Standing in this vision for our relationship anchored us to who we were for our selves, our family and our friends. This vision for our partnership became a powerful foundation for us as we stepped into our new future.

Show your collage to others whenever you have a chance. Share it with friends and family. Sharing your collage with others can be a wonderful way to let the people know what is important for your relationship and for your lives.

The Merlin Principle: Co-creating your Future

Before creating a power vision of their future, a couple can anchor themselves in what they value and in the vision for their partnership. To create a vision of their future, a couple can use the Merlin Principle exercise. In this exercise, a couple first envisions images of their future, irrespective of time. They have an opportunity to bring their whole life to the process, looking in the all areas of their life, such as their home, family, friends, community, work, career, retirement, play, recreation, and health.

The couple jointly shares in a conversation what they see for their future. As they create those images, the couple steps into those future images and experiences what it is like having that future be real in the world. Where are they living (in the future)? How does it feel to have that future? What do they experience (as they stand in that future)? What does it look like? What is it that inspires the couple in having that future?

As the couple dwells in the future they have co-created, they use the same abilities that Merlin the Magician did as mentor to the great King Arthur of the Round Table. Merlin had an uncanny ability to see and know the future before it was to happen. Such a view from the future gave Merlin extraordinary insights into what would happen in the present and what actions he would advise King Arthur to take.

Co-creating images of the future and standing in that future together in the present gives the couple the same magic that Merlin the Magician had. The couple can create the future of their partnership and then, sharing together, they can see their future, they can feel it, and they can sense what it is like. This phenomenon of planning action in the present from a shared vision of the future can be referred to as The Merlin Principle.

The Merlin Principle Exercise

To engage in the Merlin Principle Exercise, sit opposite each other with paper and a pen. Take time to envision your future. Ask yourselves: What do you want for your lives

together in the future? What lights you up and inspires you? What gets you out of bed? What are you passionate about?

As you envision your future, ask yourselves, what do you experience or who are you being in your life (in that future)? Express the images you see. Look in the areas of your home, your family, your friends, your community, your work, your career, your retirement, your play, your recreation, and your health. Notice any limits you have on your future or what is possible. Share with each other for 30 minutes or so. Paint a picture. Dream big. Have fun and be outrageous.

- Where are you living?
- What do you have?
- Where is your family?
- What are you doing?
- How are you feeling about your life?
- What do you see, sense and feel?
- Are you traveling?
- What are doing during the day
- What are you doing in the evenings and on the weekends?

After envisioning, experiencing and sharing your future, choose and align on a time frame for manifesting the future you have co-created. You can choose an aligned time frame of 25 years, 15 years, 10 years, 5 years, or 2 years. Standing together in your co-created future, view the path from that future to the present moment and speculate about what actions you took and what you accomplished along the way. Look at when those actions and accomplishments occurred. Working from the future (say, 10 years out) to the present time, articulate, in a timeline, the milestones, accomplishments and the actions that naturally occurred on the path to your future.

Declare together that the future you have created is a possible future for you both and commit to that future. Almost immediately what will occur for you both is that a whole host of “partnership projects” will come into view, waiting to be given structure and to be fulfilled. Where you become “partners in action” is in the creation of partnership projects designed to fulfill the future you have co-created.

Partnership Projects

Look at all the areas of your life. Begin to speculate on possible partnership projects. Brainstorm different areas and ideas. After co-creating the vision of your future using the Merlin Principle, you will find that many projects will start to appear on your joint radar screen. Speculate about some of the projects that are occurring to both of you now that you created and aligned on your future.

In what area of your life, do you want to design a project? Projects are designed to realize the vision of your life that you have generated. Projects are also time limited and have a measurable result. Possible life domains might be home improvement, financial, children/family, career, vacation/travel, etc. Find an area of your life in which you would like to design a project over a 3-, 6- or 12-month time frame. It can be longer if you wish.

Review the six steps of The Partnership Project Design below. When creating partnership projects and bringing them to fruition, you will find there are steps to being successful. You will also discover that, throughout the life of your project(s), it works

best to meet regularly so you can evaluate the results of your actions, plan the next steps of your project and be in alignment on a regular basis. The recommended steps in co-creating and in managing a partnership project are:

1. Co-create the future accomplishment of the partnership project. "Our project is to have (an accomplishment) by (specific time)."
2. Identify the shared current perspectives and concerns that frame the project.
3. Brainstorm other empowering perspectives and choose powerful ways of being for the partnership project.
4. Create the actions and the interim accomplishments necessary to fulfill the partnership project and put them into a timeline.
5. Name the project.
6. Schedule regular project meetings.

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."

Schedule Time to Create a Vision for your Partnership and your Future

You can set aside time to engage in some of the conversations and activities outlined above. Many of these conversations are ideal for times you are home alone, out on a date or out to dinner together and can be fun, romantic and inspiring. I encourage you to regularly explore the vision you have for your partnership in life and also to create and then fulfill on a vision for your future together! I hope that this has given you a valuable tool that can promote possibility, partnership and passion in your relationship.

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