

Collaborative Lifestyle

A Composite lifestyle formed when two emotionally involved partners merge their likes/dislikes into a harmonious compromise of both.

When two emotionally involved people make the decision to share their lives in a more permanent way, they are faced with the task of combining their individual “Life – Styles” into one that is neither “mine” nor “yours” but “ours - A daunting task that is often overlooked because of the prospects of a permanent Romantic Love that focuses on the fulfillment of dreams, ambitions and being together. However, most of the couples that I have worked with really don’t understand what a Collaborative Lifestyle is, and continue a path that does not reflect the true potential of their Love Relationship. Rather they learn to accept each other in an effort to validate their feelings of connectedness without realizing that they are taking on roommate identities. Eventually difficulties surface because of their misunderstanding about their Love relationship. Never forget, *“Roommates live around each other; Lovers live “with” each other. Know the Difference!”*

*You knew the way you I was when you met me, if you didn’t like it
you shouldn’t have married me!*



Why is Collaborative Lifestyle so Hard?

I use to play tennis at a local park. Usually I played singles (one-on-one). I decided to try playing doubles (two-on-two). I had never done this. Immediately problems began as I tried to hit every ball; I was accustomed to covering the whole court and not to sharing it! My partner got frustrated and threatened to quit. I took a time-out and told to him I had never played “doubles” before and needed time to adjust. You see my “automatic” reactions were to hit every ball – it was almost unnatural to allow one to pass. I asked him to be patient, and I would confront my eagerness, and allow balls to pass so he could play too!

In time I got pretty good playing “doubles”. I learned to judge which shots were mine and which I should allow to pass. At the break we talked about strategies and I learned to use my intuition to play a better game. By observing my partner I learned his strengths and aggressively took strategic positions which allowed him to play at his best. Other times, I took shots I could have allowed to pass because my partner was in position. Together “we“ played better as “I” learned to combine “my” strengths and weaknesses into “our” strengths and weakness’.

This story describes the difficulty all of us have as we transition from being “single” to one of partnership. Life is easier when “I” make all the decision about “my” life. But that changes abruptly when I select a permanent mate and begin sharing lifestyles. Now I have to change “my” style to better fit into “your” style so that “we” can play better as a “partnership”. In many ways the example of “doubles” tennis describes the frustrations of making this adjustment. Changing from “singles” play to “doubles” play can be awkward, frustrating and uncomfortable – it requires a different mindset. However, once you begin assessing your strengths and weakness’ - individually and as a partnership - then the work of adjusting your automatic reactions can begin!

How Do I Become More Collaborative?

When I *collaborate* with you, I am making an extra effort to “co - labor” with you. I am choosing to work with you in such a way that the focus is no longer about “my” individual efforts but rather about “us” as a team. In other words, it is about “me” allowing for “us” to learn how to play together better - not for “my” singular satisfaction but for “our” satisfaction as a couple.

When a man or woman chooses to collaborate with a partner it is sometimes arouses feelings of frustration and anxiety. The frustration is that at times it is easier to just do the thing that needs to be done, rather than to wait for my partner to do it. This is similar to my experiences in tennis when I had to allow the ball to pass me, even though I had a shot at it, so my partner could play the ball. But the reward that comes is not in hitting the ball first, it is in the development of teamwork that the ball is hit the best.

Collaboration Requires a Different Mindset

Just as a “singles” tennis player has to combat his automatic reflexes in order to learn “doubles” – so must you learn to confront your “singles” lifestyle mindset. There will be times you accidentally step on your partners toes; and times they will step on yours; but step back and look at the Big Picture! This is no more serious then when two people leaning to play “doubles” have a mid-court collision.

Remember Love relationships win when “they” play at their best as a team, and shy away from individual efforts. There will be times when you run into each other as you each learn from your mistakes, don’t get angry or frustrated – settle back and study each others “style”. Learn from each other and design a way that allows you to play “collaboratively”. You will find it is actually easier that “single” once you get the hang of it!



The Best Team is not the one made up of the “Best” players, it is the one that plays together the Best!

Staying Feeling Focuses Yet Facts Respectful

The challenges of making love work are easily overcome if you can accomplish becoming collaborative – and this can only occur if you can adjust your decision making processes by staying feeling focused and facts respectful. Why is this so hard?

There are many reasons why you and I become insensitive to the feelings of those we love. The easiest and most obvious reason is the ever present pressures of living in an economy that demands that you learn to participate in the business world. Earning an income requires you to become “profit” oriented and adjust to the notion of making decisions that are for the good of the company. The pressures to make decisions that emphasize “facts” and not “feeling” are ever present, so over time successful business people become increasingly aware of making the right business decision is connected to remaining objective and emotionally disconnected. Think about what I just said – 40+ hours a week you are training yourself to fit into “economic lifestyle” of profitability, making huge efforts in school, training and peer relationships to do this – and then after a hard day it is time to go home and face a different challenge – building a love based

“collaborative lifestyle” that is the polar opposite of everything you just did during the employment day!!

It is vitally important to accept this difference (Business Lifestyle over Love Lifestyle) – One is Facts Over Feelings while the other is Feelings Over Facts!!! Unless you distinguish between the two you are destined to “big” trouble.

Exercising Give and Take - Staying Flexible.

A while back I had gone on a successful fishing trip and had caught my legal limit. One of the “*not so luck*” fishermen - who had been pushy and overbearing - was leaving the dock and I gave him a part of my catch and said, “This was such a great trip, and as far as I’m concerned everybody should share what “we” caught. So take a few of these and enjoy.” He didn’t say much, took my offer and left the dock. Later that evening he called, commented that he had a hard time watching others catch their limit while he didn’t get a bite. He apologized for his behavior, thanked me for gift, and asked if there was something he could do in exchange for my generosity. Wow! What a shift this person had made! Later, when I recalled the fishing trip to a group of men I caught myself saying, “I am glad I threw him a fish”. That term has stuck in my mind since then, and whenever I see an opportunity to break down a barrier I think to myself “throw him a fish and see what happens?”

Give-n-take is the foundation of a healthy *collaborative* Love relationship; a Love relationship can not exist without it! However there are occasions when barriers develop and it seems that there is just no way to work through to a happy resolution. It is at these times that I bring back that notion of “Throw them a fish”. More times than not the unexpected generosity brings a resultant willingness to reciprocate with some other positive gesture. Once the mood is broken things begin to shift to a more relaxed environment which promotes positive problem solving.



Love is process not a destination. It is not a passive act of submission, but rather an assertive dedication to collaboratively build a lasting relationship with a willing partner.

Remember Pace Not Speed

By now I hope you are beginning to understand that I believe Love relationships are “built” on purpose as a result of two dedicated partners. Re-read my definition above pay special attention to words like “process”, “dedication” and “willing partners”. These terms are used to emphasize that I believe Love is the intentional act of two people making a decision to create the love they want through their combined efforts.

If you really desire to have the most out of your Love relationship you must make dedicated/determined efforts to get the most out of each other. For some couples it is a difficult adjustment to “assert” themselves as they are more comfortable in being told what to do or how to act. The process of change takes greater effort and they need more time to learn how to be more interactive with their partners. However, changing yourself so that you get into a new or different habit is worth the time and energy. Just as a person learning to change their eating habits will loose weight so will you learn to improve in your relationship. So I am asking you to be aware that habits take time to change and be patient with yourself and your partner - but remember Steady and Predictable will always out perform Random and Intermittent. Your best results will come if you focus on ***Pace and Not Speed***.

Where Do I Start?

Sometimes people are not even aware that they are playing “singles” in a “doubles” game. First, I want to make it clear that I think all of us have the ability to be “collaborative”. I believe you have the skills that are needed – you just have to shift your attention to a “doubles” strategy. In order to investigate this, I would like you to read each of the questions below and reflectively look over your present relationship.

But take your time, and build stability and predictability into the process of growth. It takes time to get a In the section on “how to be more collaborative?” I give you directions that guide you through the process of building a collaborative relationship; and in how to use this chapter I direct you to other activities that are from my other book, “Love, Lost and Found”. Make no mistake these questions are not simple yes or no” answers and you will need to commit yourself to answering these question with as much depth and meaning as you find comfortable. But it takes time to absorb, process and understand the answers that you and your partner share. As you work through the

section on “learning about myself” be as comprehensive as you can. If it gets too confusing or unclear, as a personal friend (not your love partner) that has long-term knowledge of your life to help you sort through these ideas.

The Process of Becoming Collaborative

Part A: Questions To Ask Yourself:

1. When given time at the dinner table or alone do you tend to talk about work?
2. Do you question your partner at the end of a day about what he/she did or did not do?
3. Do you tell him/her what to do when presented with a problem?
4. Are you accustomed to giving your opinion on matters of your partner’s life?
5. Are you harsh in your opinions of those around you?
6. Are you intolerant of mistakes that people make that cause you delays?
7. Do you pride yourself in your ability to predict failure?
8. Are you known as opinionated?
9. Are you rough on people, but it is for their own good?
10. Do you loose respect for people who make “stupid” decisions?

There is no right or wrong answers here, but if you have more “yes” answers than “no” answers, I would recommend sitting down with your partner and asking the following questions.

Part B: Question To Ask Your Partner:

1. Do you believe that I listen to you?
2. Do you think I give to much advice?
3. Do I show interest in your ideas?
4. In what areas could I work to better understand you?
5. If you had personal problem bothering you, would you share it with me?
6. Do you think I am too critical of you? If so in what areas?
7. Do you think I exclude your input from “our” decisions?
8. Do I try to change your opinion when it is different from mine?
9. If you could ask me to change one way that I treat you, what would it be?
10. What could I do more to validate your part in our relationship?

If you take the time to answer these questions, you are beginning the process of change. It is important to realize that sometimes couples have to step backwards a few steps before they can step forward. That is, collaborative relationships take more thought and energy (at first) as you begin to learn how to “play” and “communicate” differently.

The Top Eight Obstacles

1. You Knew I Was This Way When You Married Me

Of all the disturbing comments I hear from couples struggling to move ahead this one tops my list. The notion that any person could possibly believe that he/she can be just the way they were when they were single is absolutely outlandish. Love relationships by design require each of us to modify, adjust and conform in ways that bring a greater level of success in a “partnership”. On the most basic level when one person is determined to maintain their individuality they cause other people adjust – if for nothing else but to make room for them and stay out their way.

If you are a person that has said this, please reconsider your words. By nature Love Relationships are dynamic and change over time. Being a “father” changes as the children grow; changing from student to worker as you complete college courses; doing what your boss requests when it is not your desires – all these are fundamental changes you will make. Get over it – get on with it!

Everybody Goes Through This

Don’t allow yourself to think this way! It may appear on the surface that your pressures are just like everyone else’s. However your personality, tastes and desires are unique to you and only you; just as your own finger print! When you combine your unique personality with someone you love there is no possibility that the issues you have are even remotely similar to “everybody” else’s.

Your relational challenges require that every effort be given to validating how different you are, and never compare yourself to others. Maintain a reverent respect for your singular qualities and be passionately committed to “co-laboring” together.

2. I’m Too Busy

Careers, Chores and Children are what I call the 3 C’s of relationships. A large portion of your daily energy is spent meeting the demands of these three, singularly or

in combination - you must keep them in balance or they will damage your relationship. Learning how to do this takes time, skill and focus, but you can do it!

Remain sensitive to each others *Life-Load*, and make every effort to inform the other when it appears one of the 3 C's is out of balance and stress is building! Also, remind yourself that when your stress increases you more intolerant and more insensitive to those around you - even your reactivity jumps up a notch. The risk of destroying your Love relationship dramatically increases as relational energy which should have been invested in quality time, emotional intimacy and romance, are drained by the chaos caused by an out of control lifestyle. Unless you restore balance, the emotional drain will run you down.

3. Difficult Personalities:

1) Extravert, Judgmental Know-it-alls: Extravert personalities tend to “Talk First And Think Later”. These people are known as being Judgmental - they tend to collect information from the world around them to build their opinions of what life is about. *They listen only to collect information to prove you wrong* (Facts over Feelings). They are more interested in “you” getting their point of view, and minimally interested in the opposite. Judgmental personalities must learn to “listen” to understand what others are saying, and quit trying to prove them wrong! They must learn to “shut-up” and accept people for who they are – and not who they can make them!

2) Introvert, Quiet, Never-Say-A-Word Types: Introvert personalities tend to “Think First And Talk Later”. They are difficult because they don't know how to be “actively” involved in brain-storming or problem solving. They are often misunderstood because their expressionless facial appearance don't convey their internalized thought processes – and sometimes they appear unmoved, or even disinterested – they are misperceived. Introvert Quiet types don't understand the importance of standing in the shoes of those that are trying to communicate. Too often they are clueless of the negative impact they have on those that are get frustrated in their attempts to communicate. Introvert, Quiet Types must learn to speak up and convey to others what is going on inside, and at a minimum “ask” the more extravert personalities for more time to process.

4. Inability To Express What I Am Feeling

Yes there are those people that have such lousy communications skills that they don't know how, are inhibited from trying, or do so poorly. There are reason for this to happen. One example might be a person that was raised in a family that discouraged siblings from speaking their mind as a show of respect for their elders. Another example might be a child that was taught to do what they were told and to quit questioning "why?". Later in life as these children become adults they have difficulties in Love relationships.

First, consider from their perspective it is they way they were raised and they do not have any experience at expressing themselves in an open positive environment. So they may perceive that disagreements are bad, and that by making waves they are hurting the relationship. They are sort of "wired" to want to fit in and really don't think independently. No they are not intentionally making efforts to derail or damage the growth potential of the relationship, they just don't think independently. However, whatever was taught can be untaught.

5. I'm Too Old To Change

Of all the ridiculous statements a person can say, this one tops the cake. At least be honest and say "I don't want to do it your way and that's it! At a minimum there is an advantage to being honest because you are telling someone something about yourself that is understandable. If there is one thing that I am certain of it is this "Age alone does not has priority over freewill!". If you choose not to change – so be it, but remember everything I have written in this chapter and in particular the section that said, "love is a process, and not a destination." If you have cut yourself off from interacting with the world around you, then you have limited the process and probably sold yourself short.

6. Self-Centeredness / Selfishness.

Single sighted "me" not "we" people are only interested in themselves. You can not have a love relationship with a person like this. If you are still in this relationship, after all your attempts to "collaborate" have failed then I would recommend one of two options: 1) Learn to share space like a "roommate" and don't allow yourself to be used; set limits to what you will give-up or contribute or 2) if you are dead set on having a Love

Relationship, and you have sought professional help, and there are no other avenues, start working on breaking your emotional ties so you can move on.

7. Prejudice or Bias

Unfortunately many people enter the adult world with opinions that were imbedded in them from childhood. Unlike the selfish person that has made a decision about what want, those with prejudices/biases are merely extending the views they were taught by their mentors, and have not come to grasp the error in their logic.

I believe it is important to wring out your own feelings about troubling areas in your relationship, and make sure that the feelings and experiences you are having are yours and not those that have been taught to you. Talk to a friend, bounce ideas off your pastor, and find a way to get new information that is a source of comparison. Find alternative points of view, and regardless of the discomfort - expose yourself to other notions of fairness and equity. By doing this you may be able to break down your own understanding of the distressing area and eventually develop what “you” believe is the right answer for you as a Collaborative party to a Love relationship. Yes it may be a lot of work, but it must be done if you are experiencing problems in this area.

Other Common Obstacles

- I’m okay but you are not
- Self Centeredness
- Prejudice or Bias
- I like being the way I am – I don’t want to change
- It’s not how I was raised

The Top Eight Strategies

1. Put yourself in their Shoes

Empathy is the ability to put yourself into another persons shoes. Unless you can see the world from their view you can not understand what they are experiencing. In order to do this, ask as many questions as you need to help you to gain a perspective that is from their vantage point. Resist collecting information to prove them wrong and develop an understanding of their side of the story as you attempt to stand in their shoes.

Recall earlier that I elaborated my opinion that the Work Environment tends to encourage deductive reasoning and logic in decision making, and place more emphasis on “facts over feelings” - while the Love Environment requires that I pay more attention to subjective experiences and emotional reasoning, “feelings over facts”!. t.

If you are to work through, break through into a more meaningful relationship you must never forget that in a Love Relationship- *“It is not about what is happening that is important – but rather how I feel about what is happening!”*

2. Be Sensitive To Their The Top Two Relational Needs

1) Your Needs that I Don’t Satisfy:

Your partner may have needs that you are not aware of and can be easily accommodated once they are clearly identified. So ask the question: “Are there any needs that you have that I am not satisfying?” Then listen and learn from your partner what it is that is missing? Once you have identified a need, ask this question, “What could I do to satisfy that need?” Remember you always reserve the right to refuse, but in this step you are just trying to identify other options.

2) My Needs You Satisfy That I Don’t Appreciate (or Didn’t Notice):

There are so many things that my partner does for me day to day that I am sure that I have taken many of them for granted. I know I can do a better job at recognizing what they are but first it is in my benefit to just ask the question, “Are there things you do for me that you believe I no longer notice or appreciate?”. Once this is done it makes it easier to show recognition for the energy they spent in doing them. Don’t allow the *Routines & Rituals* of life to become so predictable that they are: 1) Forgotten, 2) Accepted, or 3) Expected!

One thing that always helps relationships is when you practice observational skills as a way of life, and learn to look for the contributions others have made, or are making to your life as a day-to-day activity. If ever you are in doubt just make it known: “Honey I am so busy I have become disconnected from being aware of all the many things you do for me, and I just want to say ‘thank-you’. I love you,

and if you can set some time aside for me, I would like to have a quiet evening to show you my appreciation?"

"You can win every argument and still end up in divorce court."

3. Listen Twice – Talk Once

No single action can make a relationship better than to listen more than you talk. Previously I wrote "it is not about what happened, but how I feel about what happened" and "Love relationships are 90% Feelings and 10% Facts, while Work relationships are 90% Facts and 10% Feelings. Now when you place those two thoughts together you can't help but recognize the importance of learning to "listen".

Listening is a Learned Skill – I have never met a person that became a good listener without having done some self study, or other training. As a rule we are taught that listening is a "passive" act whereby we keep our mouths shut and ears open. Yet Listening is about understanding what another person is attempting to express in words what they are feeling. The chances are against them doing this successfully unless you ask questions that clarify how you are interpreting their communications. The best technique I have ever encountered is "reflective Listening". I have placed in Appendix A Guidelines on Reflective Listening, or review Chapter 6 in Love, Lost & Found for a better discussion and exercises.

4. Rejoice in Each Other

The more emphasis you place on how unique and important your relationship is the more you will respect and enjoy it. Incredible things happen when an atmosphere of delight and pleasure are bestowed in your partnership. I am asking you to find ways to pay special attention to anniversaries, birthdays or other special occasions so that your relationship takes on an identity that is annotated by celebration. Be your own cheer leaders! When you do this you might even find you develop a sense of Esprit Décors that makes you feel different and special as a couple.

Don't allow your relationship to be average, typical or ordinary; create an atmosphere of joyful exploration - Make every effort to find uniqueness and individuality. Be proud of what you have together and let others experience and observe your relationship is as a couple. Once you have made rejoice a part of your Love

relationship you will find it hard to be apart from it! That in itself will greatly contribute to your relational potential.

5. Learn to Live With Style!

The only difference between you and every other living human being is the day-to-day choices you make that reflect your individual preferences. Add all these together and they cumulatively reflect your “lifestyle”. Now take two individual lifestyles and merge them into a Love Relationship and we call this a “Collaborative Lifestyle”. Whatever your style, recognize that you and your partner must develop one that is “Neither yours nor mine - but ours”; consider it your hallmark as a couple.

Work hard to find the tempo, rhythm and style that best demonstrates your identity as a couple. Some couples are known as *Sports Crazyed, Never-Miss-A-Game Types*, while others are known as *Christian, Community Centered Activists*, and yet I have known others that were known as *Cajun, Live-Every-Moment Extraverts*. It really doesn't matter to me what you choose for a *Collaborative Lifestyle* identity – in fact you might have more than one. For instance, you can be the *Sports Fanatic* during the football season, and the *Fishing Family* during the summer, what is important to me is that you do it. Make the extra effort necessary to surround yourself with those things you as a couple identify with - pictures, paintings, furnishings and decor that guide others to recognize, understand and identify your qualities as a couple. You see in this way your home reflects the lifestyle you and your partner have chosen that sets you out from every one else - live with style and enjoy every moment of it!

Make Quality Time A Weekly Event

Many people do not really understand *quality time*. They misperceive that going to the mall, movies or shopping is *quality time* – it is not. Let me explain, you and I can go to the movie every night for the next six weeks, spend tens of hours together – talk about and discuss every plot of every movie - but never even share the most basic information about our tastes, desires or goals. Movies, shopping or mall cruising are examples of leisure or entertainment but not *Quality Time*.

Quality time is the term I use to identify special time we set aside to be emotionally intimate as we talk about ourselves and what we are about. It is time set aside when I

talk about my dreams, goals and desires. It is time that I tell you about me in such terms that you are able to understand how I think and feel. Quality time is more about being emotionally intimate than anything else. When we do this each of us shares information that helps the other to understand those private and confidential areas of our lives that contributes to my understanding and intuition about who you are and what is important. By doing this you get become intimately involved in each other and the bond between you grows stronger.

Emotional Intimacy: Private and confidential emotional energies that I hold inside which when shared help you to understand me.

6. Have a Sense of Humor

Laughter and humor are useful tools that can help restore anyone's peace of mind. Learn to look back over the time you have spent together and selectively bring forward those fun things you experienced in your relationship. Make special efforts to recall these humor filled times to friends, family and neighbors. Add to this any light hearted on-going humorous anecdote and you are off and running.

There is another aspect of humor that can have dramatic long term impacts on your future collaboratively. Humorous recollections of what could have been interpreted as bad luck, help people to learn about you, but also to make fun of what others consider troubling times.

A few years ago my wife and I were driving to visit relatives on Christmas Eve well after sunset when I had a flat tire on a dark section of Interstate I -10 when the weather was rainy and below 40 degrees. I have told the story about being wind blown by every passing 18 wheeler, as our dog watched from the comfort of the heated car. I elaborate on the tire jack sinking into the mud, and how numb my hands were as I could not feel the lug nuts. Let me tell you I play it up big, and everybody gets a big laugh. But look how valuable it is to turn what might have been bad luck and misfortune into funny stories that people wait in line to hear. I have made our relationship something better by denying the opportunity for something bad and unfortunate to be recalled for something other than humorous and funny.

7. Treat Your Partner Like You Want To Be Treated

There is no greater joy than to be held in high regard by someone you respect and/or admire. There is a contagious energy that is both positive and motivational when you are greeted by someone that respects you. I have always done my best when the person I am working for thinks I am the best. In fact, I will try even harder if I think I can do a little better job if it is for someone that I know thinks highly of me. The flip side of that is also true. Have you ever noticed that when you are not liked that you don't feel the energy or enthusiasm to give that extra effort?

Now consider the impact this mechanism can have on your present relationship? Find ways to let your partner know you believe in them and interact in such ways that they feel you possible feelings about them. If this is something you are uncertain about, then sit back and imagine to yourself how you would like to be treated. Picture in you mind the facial expressions, positive regard and enthusiasm you would like to experience. Now do it. Don't allow your mind to dredge up one negative thought from the past (scorecard items). Treat them as if they were the most important person in your life and see how this works. If by chance this blows up in your face and they feed back to you negative energy then we have a different problem. When a person shuns you in this way we call it "passive aggressive"; this means they are punishing you for something that they have not forgiven you for. If this happens the best thing to do is to just ask, "I can tell by the way you are treating me that you have a beef with me. Are you ready to talk about it?".

Other Strategies:

- Random Acts of Kindness
- Do the Mason Jar Exercise
- Charge the Emotional Battery

Explore, Employ and Enjoy

I have known people that have remodeled their home so many times that it is hard to tell where the last effort started or ended. Better yet I have visited homes where the layout really does not make sense unless you have someone explain the different additions and modification that were made, and give a background on how they got to

this final design. Too late they realize that if they had just sat down and done a little planning they could have gotten to a better design in half the time and much less cost. This chapter give guidelines that will speed up the process of developing a Collaborative Lifestyle by assisting you in addressing important issues that can help you get moving in the right direction. .

*"A Love relationship is not about what "we" did -
- but rather about what we "felt" when we did it."*