



Jorge &amp; Diane Brunet-Garcia

# MIXING BUSINESS & PLEASURE

Launching a startup with your soulmate could be the best—or worst—personal and professional decision of your life

Couples who mix work with marriage are on the rise, according to the most recent national stats available. Approximately 65 percent of U.S. businesses are family owned, with about 30 percent co-owned by spouses. Here, two Jacksonville couples who've been harmonious in marriage and in business for several years offer their vital business ownership vows—the “we do’s” and “we don’ts” of working together

## The Business: Brunet-Garcia Advertising Agency

**The Couple:** Diane and Jorge Brunet-Garcia married in 1987, after knowing each other for three years. They met while working in advertising in Atlanta—Jorge was a creative director and

Diane a freelance writer. After tying the knot, they teamed up on several freelance projects. In 2003, both decided it was time to hatch their own agency.

**Do Get the Timing Right.** Jorge says it may have been easier for him and Diane to start their agency because they had worked together before. “The timing was right because we had long commiserated about what we did and didn’t like about the way other places we’d work for were run. Starting our own was a way to actualize the thoughts we had of creating a business model that was different and better than anywhere else we’d worked.”

**Don’t Muddle Job Roles.** Diane says, “It was pretty clear to us by the time we started that I needed to migrate from writer/producer

to account management. We had a clear delineation of responsibility. I went off and did my thing at work, and so did he. If not, we would’ve folded. It is important to have a wall between us at work, otherwise it would be way too much togetherness.”

**Do Have Common Goals.** For the Brunet-Garcias, a shared goal was creating an ad agency that didn’t yet exist—one that concentrated on minority markets. “Our focus on multi-lingual and multi-cultural work got us lots of clients from Miami, Tallahassee and Atlanta,” Jorge says. “Years later, we are still distinguished.”

**Don’t Try Too Hard to Keep Personal and Professional Separate.** Diane says she and Jorge talk about work over dinner, on weekends and when they are

away on vacations. “In a way it makes it richer. When we have down time that we are enjoying together, we may see something or be inspired by something that’s applicable, that we can apply to the business. These moments have been really beneficial to us personally and professionally.” Jorge also likes that their lives are intertwined 24/7. “Everything is right there,” Jorge says, of their openness. “There’s a deep level of trust in that.” He and Diane believe that this trust spills over into their relationships with their employees and clients.

## The Business: Sandler Training

**The Couple:** Michele and Pat McManamon have worked together for 16 out of the 26 years they’ve been married. Co-opening Sandler Training, which offers clients sales force development through ongoing reinforcement, was a giant leap of faith for them both.

**Do Explore Opportunities Together.** Pat says, if you can’t agree on a business, then you shouldn’t be in business together. When he and Michele were in research-mode, they came across the Sandler system of sales training and liked the idea that they could help clients grow as business people. “That was in our makeup, to help folks reach their potential, so we decided to pursue it,” Pat recalls.

**Don’t Dive In Half-Heartedly.** When Michele looked at the total workload she and Pat had of raising their two kids and trying to launch Sandler, she knew she had to close her commercial window-treatment business and that he had to resign from a six-figure job at CSX. “Just dabbling with Sandler wouldn’t have worked. We needed to take a big leap together and go for it. We couldn’t have done it otherwise.”

**Do Get In Sync About Finances.** Before she and Pat opened Sandler, Michele was willing to scale back their lifestyle and downsize. “We went from the comfort of a steady corporate salary to zero income. And we had to pay a big chunk of change upfront for the franchise rights to Sandler.” Pat agrees that you both need finan-



cial transparency. "Both parties need to understand that running a business may create revenue, but it also means bills to pay, like payroll." His best advice: build a budget on the personal and professional side.

#### Don't Forget To Take Time for the Marriage.

Pat says, "When you are busy working together and raising kids, the marriage gets pushed to the back burner. Make sure you give ample time to work on marriage." By that he means date nights, not by the office water cooler, and conversations about personal interests. The McManamons even had their kids on the healthy-marriage committee. Michele remembers, "When they were younger, if we'd talk too much about business at family dinner, they'd call us out on it and say, 'No sales talk!'"

**Do Bring In Experts to Look at Your Business.** Pat thinks they were brilliant to bring in consultants to help with org charts (to see who is doing what, and who is best at what), and offer business guidance. "Don't coach and counsel each other," Pat warns. "Constructive criticism is always received better when it's not coming from your spouse and business partner." Michele jokes, "It'd be like Pat trying to teach me how to play golf. That would not go over well." ■

## STILL STANDING

### Has the spark faded?

In June, when One Spark laid off almost its entire full-time staff—going from 11 employees to just three—many speculated that this was the beginning of the end for the oft-debated festival. Or is it?

"The festival will take place next April in Jacksonville," says One Spark boardmember Michael Munz. "The restructuring is going to be something that people will be excited about, based on a lot of feedback we've received from creators, sponsors and the community overall."

As of press time the crowdfunding festival's team has yet to release details on "One Spark 2.0"

but there have been rumors that the now smaller team is making a move to set up shop in the Jacksonville Landing.

Could this mean a new One Spark focused more closely on incubating small businesses instead of the rows of sometimes confusing "creators" attempting to make their pitches louder than the tent next door? That remains to be seen, but even though a smaller festival might not have the big impact on the city that the organizers were shooting for, perhaps it can be a more impactful one for the creators themselves—and would that really be a bad thing? ■ *by Jocelyn Tolbert*



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