



# The CANDOR Solution: The Entrepreneur's Marriage Blueprint

6 Skills for Living, Loving,  
and Working Together

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# Introduction

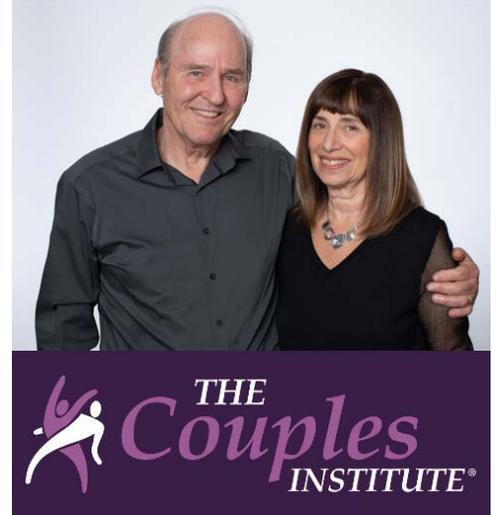
For more than 30 years, we have specialized in helping couples transform their relationships. In 1984, we cofounded The Couples Institute, where we have since worked closely with entrepreneurial couples throughout Silicon Valley. We've helped CEOs, startup founders, and small business owners, helping them better understand and overcome the unique challenges of managing a business and marriage simultaneously and successfully.

From 36 years as married partners — 34 of those years spent working with couples and building their business together — we have seen it all. We bring both personal experience and clinical expertise to our clients through innovative programs and intensive workshops, guiding couples to build lives they love with the ones they love.

The CANDOR Solution Blueprint is full of information that you can use now. We hope you can take a few of these strategies that we've learned and taught our clients to use, both in their marriage and their work together.

To your growth in marriage and business together,

Pete and Ellyn



## **Dr. Ellyn Bader, PhD and Dr. Peter Pearson, PhD**

*Co-Founders of The Couples Institute*

Considered by many to be the preeminent experts in couples therapy training, Ellyn and Pete have educated and inspired therapists and entrepreneurs across six continents. They have been featured on the *Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, and *CBS Early Morning News*, and have been quoted in publications like *The New York Times*, *Oprah Magazine*, *Business Insider*, *Redbook*, and *Cosmopolitan*.

# The Entrepreneur's Marriage

Being an entrepreneur is the second toughest job in the world.

Being an entrepreneur who successfully works with your spouse is the toughest.

## Let's go back to the beginning....

Once upon a time, Average Joe had an idea.

"Wow," said Joe. "I believe my idea can do this faster, cheaper, or better than anything out there."

Average Joe got so excited he made a plan.

And then Joe did what some people might think of as the impossible: he acted and brought his idea to life.

Some of his friends and family thought he was quite courageous. Others thought he was a bit crazy.

Joe shrugged his shoulders and said, "I thought the world would be better off with my idea so I just did it."

Often, that's how an entrepreneur is born.

## And then life gets dramatically more interesting.

Everything becomes more challenging, exciting, and unpredictable.

The moment you become an entrepreneur, your spouse becomes involved.

Maybe as an active participant in the business or maybe just as a bystander. But make no mistake, you two are in it together.

Consider the stats predicting that 50% of marriages end in divorce and over 50% of business startups fail in the first four years.

Yes, as I said, things get more challenging, exciting, and unpredictable!

What were you thinking when you started your business?

A better question would be, "What can I do to increase those odds?"

## **That's why we focus on the entrepreneur's marriage.**

My wife and I work together. And we have done so since 1984 when we co-founded The Couples Institute.

We got married in 1982, which means we only had two years of optimistic wedded bliss before we blindly threw ourselves into the entrepreneurial ring together.

Describe almost any problem of couples working together, and we will likely respond, "Been there, done that. At least twice."

And if you describe the rewards about working together, we will likely respond, "Feeling that now."

We've discovered a few simple things that forge a solid foundation if you're just getting into business with your spouse.

Or, if you've been in business together for a while, these same things can offer a powerful reset.

We've distilled our collective 70+ years of experience and thousands of hours working with couples into a process called The CANDOR Solution.

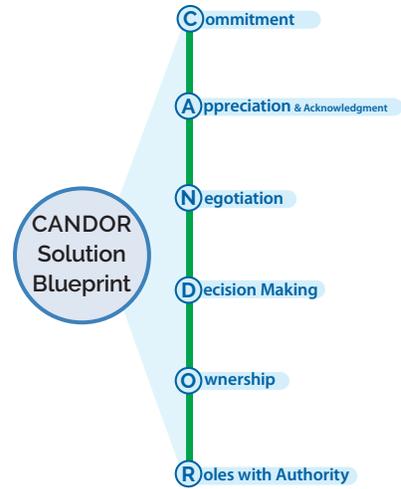
# The CANDOR Solution

What if we said you could strengthen your marriage by applying what you already know about being a successful entrepreneur?

There are six skills that you will need in order to be successful in marriage and working together.

These skills were gleaned after working with hundreds of entrepreneurial couples in Silicon Valley and around the world.

The six skills fit neatly into an acronym — CANDOR — which happens to be another great quality for people in the combined business-marriage relationship!



# The CANDOR Solution: The Entrepreneur's Marriage Blueprint

6 Skills for working successfully together



# I. ommitment

Most entrepreneurs see opportunity around every corner. A new project. A new audience. A new bullet proof idea.

But they stay committed to their business and tolerate the frustration of staying focused. They say no to the bright shiny objects. They don't run off track every time they have a life changing idea in the shower.

Every opportunity comes with its Achilles heel. A glitch that will stump you. That can trigger an impulse to start a different business. Or make other businesses look more seductive. "I bet that idea would be easier to execute..."

But commitment keeps you going in the right direction.

No matter how bad things get, your commitment and passion motivate you. They inspire you between paydays and during the times when everyone else tells you to quit.

As I said, every word in the acronym "CANDOR" contributes to your successful business and marriage. It's no surprise that "commitment" shows up first! No relationship succeeds without commitment.

On your wedding day, you made a commitment. Remember your wedding vows? Wedding vows are a great roadmap for your marriage: you wrote them – or at least agreed to them – when you were feeling your best, describing how you wanted to be at your best.

It turns out that wedding vows are also the best possible "business plan" for your future! They probably include elements of being adaptable, accepting, calm under pressure, resourceful, loving when it's not easy, and committed to grow together.

Your wedding vows were your dream. How committed were you to your dream?

Starting or growing a business is demanding. There will be times when the demands overshadow investing in your marriage.

Successful couples understand that the marriage will be more important than the business. The partners know they are they married for life. There are many possible outcomes for a successful business: your business may change, merge, be sold, or taken over. But there is only one possible outcome for a successful marriage: together forever.

We are in this journey together. Forever.

How committed are both of you to succeed in one of the toughest of challenges — living, loving, and working together?

## II. **A**ppreciation and Acknowledgement

Successful entrepreneurs keep the lines of communication open to their customers and express their appreciation in all kinds of ways.

If you believe your best customers will keep buying from you no matter how shabbily you treat them, you will soon be emptying your desk and heading for the unemployment line.

The lesson for your marriage? Treat your spouse with the same degree of enthusiasm and appreciation you would treat your very best customers.

Do you want to learn one of the guaranteed fastest ways to turn around a sour relationship in less than a month?

It's an uplifting exercise with almost a 100% success rate among all the couples we've seen who commit to it.

It sounds so simple you'll be tempted to ignore it. Don't.

This one exercise can improve your marriage. Or if your marriage is already in great shape, this will take it to new heights.

### **The Daily Double**

Twice a day for two weeks, communicate to your spouse that you love, respect, value, or appreciate what they do or who they are.

Here are a few ideas to jump start your imagination.

- Send a text, email, or greeting card, to express your appreciation, love respect
- Do a chore that is normally theirs
- Give verbal appreciations and nonverbal appreciations like touch or hugs
- Plan a mini getaway
- Bring them coffee in bed
- Wash their car or fill it with gas

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Here's a secret for one of the most powerful ways to acknowledge your spouse.  
It's guaranteed to hit home better than almost anything else you could do:

**Brag about your partner in front of other people.  
Public compliments carry way more weight than most normal ones.**

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Why does appreciation and acknowledgement work? In just about every relationship that is struggling, the most common casualty is an absence of expressed appreciation for what your spouse does or who they are.

After a while one or both people begin to feel invisible and totally taken for granted.

So, find out what makes your spouse feel loved, valued, appreciated and then make it happen.

### III. **N**egotiation

Every sale is a negotiation. Successful entrepreneurs avoid the two most common negotiation mistakes with valued customers or vendors.

1. Pushing too hard for what they want at the expense of the other party.
2. Giving away too much to make the other party happy until they give away so much they become depleted.

The same is true for marriage. Couples make two serious negotiation mistakes.

1. They bully their way through the discussion to get what they want and care little about the effect of this on the spouse.
2. Or they cave in too quickly to keep the peace.

Both strategies will doom a business and a marriage.

So what should you do instead? Here's a surprising power tool you can bring to the most intense negotiations: empathy.

#### **Empathy**

Here's an unlikely perspective of empathy.

When asked what makes a good negotiator, US Ambassador to the Middle East, Dennis Ross, said that negotiators must possess the following attributes: a high level of curiosity, the capacity to be an active listener, the ability to ask questions in a way that reveal a desire to understand, and the willingness to learn everything there is to know about the "people you're working with and the political context." Most importantly, though, negotiators must have a capacity for empathy, and a grounding sense of humility. "Don't think you know it all," Ambassador Ross warned. "Don't fall in love with your own assumptions, because negotiation will show you what you don't know."

I hope you can see Ambassador Ross also is describing a great blueprint for understanding your current and future customers and your spouse.

## IV. **D**ecision Making

Let's move on to our next skill. Decision-Making.

This sounds like such a dry topic, yet 95% of the couples who have learned our decision-making framework say they were able to use it immediately. And, it had an instant positive impact on their relationship.

All decisions can be broken down into 3 types: Unilateral, Equilateral and 51%/49%.

Unilateral decisions are just what you think. One of you makes the decision and the decision stands. There is no second guessing.

Equilateral decisions are made together with equal say in the outcome. These decisions are the slowest to be made, but they result in no lingering conflict.

Finally, 51%/49% decisions are made with one partner having more say but the other person's wishes, desires and concerns are seriously taken and applied to the outcome. This type of decision has high value and eliminates much stress from conversations.

Here are some typical examples of each type of decision:

### **Unilateral**

- Financial/investment decisions may be made by one partner
- Decisions about who to hire and how work is structured on projects you lead
- How we each spend our agreed upon personal time

### **Equilateral**

- Household budget
- Where we go on vacation
- How much personal money we invest in our business

### **51/49%**

- Decorating and Remodeling
- Kids' school schedules and after school activities
- Specific areas in the business may be delineated as 51% and 49%

Before approaching a touchy topic, decide up front what type of decision it is.

None of us knows when a really tough decision will show up in our lives. Having an effective framework to use will eliminate many thin ice moments.

We want you to be prepared and equipped to tackle these moments collaboratively and effectively.

**Here's one good example about how a couple used the 51/49%  
to prevent a possible nightmare.**

Manuel was a very high-powered and well known entrepreneur. He received an invitation to appear on a high-profile TV show, like Shark Tank. He wanted it badly.

His wife was 7 months pregnant. He wanted to discuss it with her. He knew it would be a very tense discussion, because he had not been there for the birth of his first child.

He'd have to fly to another city for the filming on a particular day 3 days before his wife's due date.

He went to his wife and said honey, "I want to have a difficult discussion with you. It's important to me that we make this decision together. Before we even start I would like you to know that you have 51%."

They proceeded to have a very deep discussion about the trip and what the outcome would mean to each of them. In the end she decided she wanted him to stay at home.

He later reported, "I could say without resentment or without feeling like I was being controlled or thwarted in my career path."

She said, "The way he handled it not only felt respectful to me, it also surprisingly helped heal some of my past pain." I listened and understood what he was giving up, but I did not want to be alone.

And as it turned out, his second child was born on the day he would have been away.

Both of them marveled about how well the 51/49% served them.

## V. Ownership

Ownership is an attitude of taking responsibility for yourself instead of making excuses when something fails or doesn't go right.

Excuses come from our defensive primitive brain.

Excuses show up when someone triggers an emotional pain point in you. Under pain you flinch and make excuses.

We all make excuses when something goes wrong and we have no desire to learn.

Excuses are seductive in that they free us from being blamed and invite us to blame others or events.

Most of the time excuses take the form of whine, blame, shame, guilt, or retreat.

Instead of this, own your reactions! The desire to manage flinching and making excuses is the first step toward better collaboration at work and at home.

Flinching is an involuntary action, so it's not easy to own and be responsible for your flinches.

It's not easy to learn about your spouse's flinches.

But you and your spouse can learn to work as a team to overcome the flinches and bring out the best in each other.

### **Advance from flinching to collaboration.**

I was talking to a former Navy fighter pilot who now flies small airplanes into local airports. When getting close to the airport the person in the control tower will say to the pilot, "State your intention."

That means are you landing or flying through? Are you doing a touch and go because you're training a pilot? Or something else?

This clarification can prevent potential danger.

### **State Your Intention**

When you start a difficult discussion with your spouse, state your intentions. You can also use this when a discussion starts to go sideways.

One of you should ask, "What are your intentions in this discussion?"

Different intentions could be:

- I just want to be heard and understood. No need for advice.
- I just want a little sympathy for what I'm going through.
- I'm looking for a little advice because I don't know what to do.
- I would like to problem solve this issue with me.
- I just want to vent.

- I'm hoping you can give me a little credit for ...
- I just want you to hear me, then for you to take action on...
- I would like you to find something that you can agree with when I say ...
- Hopefully when you hear me out you could find a way to apologize for what you did.
- Actually, I just want a hug.

These are some examples of intentions for a discussion. And the intention can also shift during the discussion. For example, you could go from wanting to be understood to solving a problem.

If there is a shift, tell your partner. It's like the pilot saying they want to land after all.

Many people assume their intent is quite clear to the spouse.

After interrupting thousands of disagreements in the office and asking each person to describe the main point or intention of the other person, I can report that only about 15% made a reasonably good guess.

That means about 85 % of couples got it totally wrong. They were clueless about the main point or intention their partner was trying to communicate! You can imagine the number of conversational crashes they have.

Stating your intentions can help you avoid flinching and become more collaborative.

## VI. Roles with authority.

When you are in business with your spouse, it is crucial to know who is responsible for what at work, and also at home! Define your role, embrace it and make it happen.

So many entrepreneur couples have said to us, "I had to learn to stay in my lane."

Here's the kicker. And it trips up a lot of couples. Each partner must have the authority that goes with their role.

Define the role and then trust your partner to carry their weight. No nagging. No checking in.

Nagging and checking in will lead to inevitable fighting, friction, and power struggles.

One of the things that undermines most employees in any organization is giving them responsibilities without the authority to get the job done.

Constantly monitoring progress of the person in charge of their role is just as offensive, and you have to deal with it at home as well as at work.

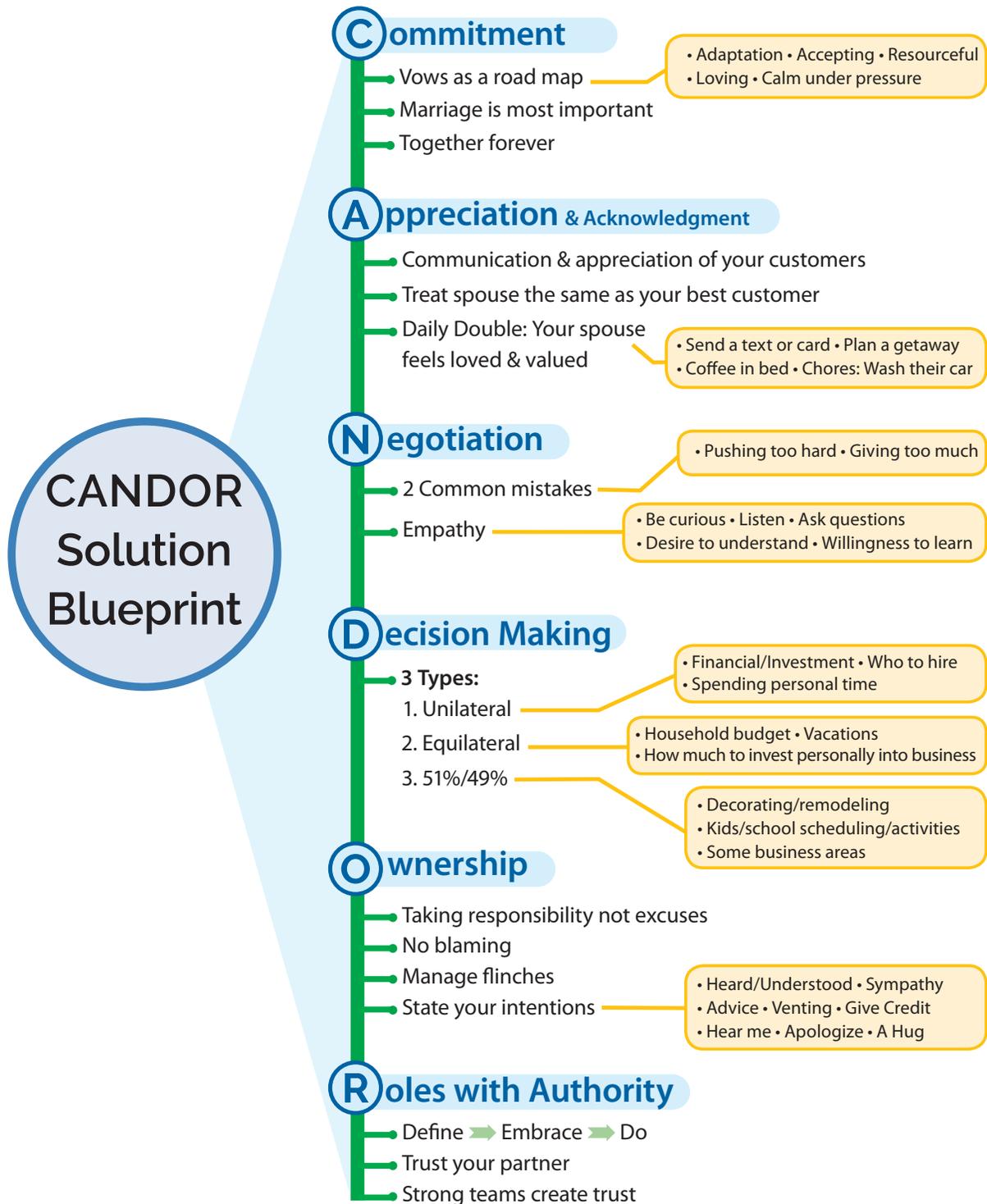
If you say you will do it, then by gosh do it. Or tell your spouse there will be a delay and if necessary, discuss the delay and perhaps negotiate new measurements. This builds trust.

Strong teams create trust.

**No trust = no strong team. It is as difficult and as simple as that.**

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6 Skills for working successfully together



## So remember the six steps of The CANDOR Solution

There you have it. The six skills successful entrepreneurs can apply to their marriage to beat the odds, bring out the best in each other, and create one really strong team.

Apply the tips from above and your marriage will get better.

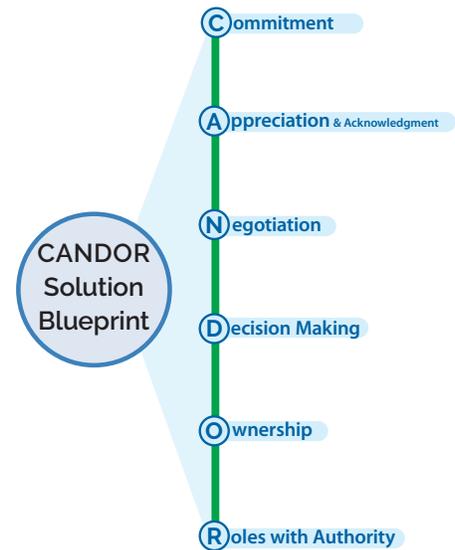
On your own, you probably won't go deep enough to see you through the long haul.

But going deeper with each step of the **CANDOR** solution can help you align your visions, interests, priorities, and values. In both business and marriage.

We know this is a tall order. But it's how you beat the odds that are stacked against you when are together in marriage and business.

Every entrepreneur is looking for an edge. That edge just might be closer than you think.

If you want to explore the CANDOR Solution possibilities for your situation, together we can figure out your next steps. Email Pete at [ptpphd@gmail.com](mailto:ptpphd@gmail.com).



Ellyn Bader and Peter Pearson