

Love is a Partnership

The Reagan love story will be told and retold by the press as long as people want to hear about it. The story will take on the iconic vision of two people who supported each other through thick and thin; the kind of relationship that movies are written about. Perhaps the most unique quality of the relationship between the Reagans was that which had nothing to do with love, sex or romance. The Reagans were very much about a partnership. What is a partnership? In the eyes of the law, a partnership is two or more people combining their efforts, energies and talents to accomplish a unified purpose. There are legal definitions of a partnership, and there are those commonly understood. There are even *de facto* partnerships, where there is no formal legal relationship but the manner of operation resembles and therefore is treated as a legal entity.

There is no question that marriage was always intended as a kind of business partnership. Adam and Eve were there to help one another. The Bible refers to Eve as a "help mate." When the two original inhabitants of the Biblical world were tossed out of the Garden of Paradise on their ear, or perhaps their butt, they had to work together to have children, till the soil, and give birth to the generations that followed. It was a partnership.

I have been in a partnership with my own wife, I have enjoyed the benefits of partnership with others, and I have felt the pain of partnerships that did not work out. I saw my parents in a partnership of business and life. I served in a business partnership with my own mother.

For many years, we used to chuckle at the curious analogy made by Judge Muir. He said that a law partnership was like a marriage. He never did say, but I think he would have been correct to note, that a marriage is like a law partnership, or perhaps like any kind of partnership.

It is my theory that business partnerships and marriage partnerships succeed or fail for the same reasons. Some business partnerships simply run out of time. People want to move on with their lives, and the partners move in different directions. Other business partnerships stay together because everyone is making money, they are too lazy to do anything about it, or the egos simply are able to tolerate one another. An older lawyer once told me that partnerships are the most unstable form of business. If that is true, perhaps that is why upwards of 50% of first marriages end in failure. I am told that second marriages fail even more often.

For a partnership to succeed, there must not only be a common purpose but also a sense of honor, integrity and likeability. There is an old adage that Albert Einstein, who knew a thing or two about failed interpersonal relationships, said that, "You have to like somebody before you can love them." Einstein said a lot of things about relationships. He

was once asked about the theory of relativity and how it could be easily explained. "When you are courting a nice girl an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder, a second seems like an hour. That's relativity."

The Reagan love story may very well be about love, but what makes it memorable from a point of view of American history is the partnership. Nancy Reagan, from all accounts, was a trusted advisor, friend and supporter. Her judgment of people could be trusted by Ronald Reagan. She knew how to protect her partner while also advancing his interests. Reagan, of course, was also a partner to his wife, a fact that we hear less about. Ronald Reagan's success meant that Nancy Reagan was elevated in terms of the success of her own judgment. The couple prospered together, and when they had troubles they failed together.

Perhaps we all need to think about our relationships with family, friends and businesspeople as partnerships. What are we willing to give up in this partnership, and what do we demand out of it? Not every partnership is designed to work, and not every partnership should last forever. There are business and marital partnerships that for one reason or another become dysfunctional, or perhaps even start off on the wrong footing, without a proper foundation. Nevertheless, we have seen partnerships of different cultures, diverse belief systems, and seemingly impossible odds succeed very well. By the same token, we have seen partnerships that should work well, because of shared values, go very badly. Is there anything about the Reagan partnership that can provide a few pointers? The first matter of importance is to realize that not all partnerships between a man and a woman are necessarily about gender. There are relationships between people of the same sex or differing genders that have nothing to do with a physical component.

The first question that must be asked is, why are we in this partnership, what are we each getting out of it, and what can we each give to it? These are pretty basic questions, often forgotten with the passage of time. Good partnerships have retreats every once in a while. The partners sit down, and sometimes with the aid of an independent party, discuss why they became partners, what they want to get out of the partnership, and what the future will bring. Perhaps we should do the same thing with marriage. I remember a psychologist friend of mine once suggesting that all marriages should expire after some set period of time and would only renew after a counseling session, if both parties wanted that renewal. After the Russian Revolution, a similar system was adopted in the new society. Apparently it did not work very well, for it was abandoned in a relatively short time. There simply were too many people who let their marriages expire and wound up remarrying any number of times. They forgot the stability part of a partnership.

Even putting aside the absurd consequences of the Bolshevik experiment, there is nothing wrong with partners periodically talking about their relationship, their goals and their future. Partners may actually improve their relationship, enhance it or abandon it. Business partnerships and marriages both have lessons to teach one another. There can and should be passion, devotion and dedication in any relationship if it is going to continue

to function on a long-term basis. On the other hand, without application of practical principles, no marriage or business partnership will long endure. Trust, truth and faithfulness, as the Shabbat prayer in Likrat Shabbat notes, are the hallmark of all relationships.

Perhaps the passing of Nancy Reagan will give us all pause to think about our relationships, whether they are working and how they might be improved.

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