

A STRONG WOMAN & A STRONG MAN

CAN IT GO WELL?

When two people are successful, usually there's third one laughing – the secret lover - because a relationship is always a power struggle, especially with two strong personalities. How then do power couples like Gwen Stefani and Gavin Rossdale, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, as well as Barack and Michelle Obama manage to be and stay happy?

CELEBRITY unlocks the secret of happiness with the help of relationship experts.

It really sounds anything but romantic: “Love isn’t enough for a long-term relationship”, so says Lauren Frances, who has worked successfully as a Love Coach in Hollywood for over a decade. But when love isn’t enough, what does she advise her clients? »they should see their partnership like a business relationship. On the job we all want to be as good as possible and try every day, to give our best. We motivate and inspire our colleagues, show our good faith with solutions to problems, and generously ignore other’s mistakes to further collaboration. If they behave the same in their private lives, then nothing stands in the way of their success together«, prophesizes the author (*Dating, Mating, and Manhandling. The Ornithological Guide to Men*, Kiepenheuer Publishers, 14,95 Euro). Love is work. Or work brings love, however one sees it. Experts like Lauren Frances always refer to famous power couples and their secrets: concentrating on a main goal, self-discipline and patience are the things that hold them and all other couples together in the long run.

Of course an underlying compatibility is necessary from the get-go, that’s understood. Logically, they’d ask each other during the initial getting-to-know-one-another phase: How do you feel about marriage? About fidelity? How would you feel if I wanted an interesting job and children? If the couple is on the same wave length with their values and visions, then they can start curiously exploring each other’s strengths – which hopefully complement each other. Firstly, this is a way to balance the weaknesses on both sides. One has a forte for money handling, the other doesn’t, but in return scores points with his organizational talents or because he understands anything technical. Secondly, complementary strengths can prevent power struggles. On occasion, one or the other has the upper hand, is the ideal love situation, according to Lauren Frances: “Power couples are excellent team workers. They don’t compete for management of the important aspects of a relationship, like finances or household, on the contrary, they gladly let the other lead where he or she is the better choice”. The way to a balanced companionship is, in most cases, naturally a bit rocky. And it will happen that one rattles the power structure or the other reveals a hereto hidden weakness, which then burdens the relationship. Deciding is how both cope with that – that they don’t see a crisis in the conflict, but a task to be mastered together. Lauren Frances: “A power couple stands out not because it has less problems, but because it has many abilities to solve them.” Team spirit also counts for

the basis of a strong partnership with Ulrich Wessel, acting coach at the Bavarian Theatre academy in Munich. “On stage the proper interaction of the actors is vital for the art. All have to play on their strengths and at the same time relinquish a part of their egos, so a coherent whole is results. It’s similar in a relationship – everybody brings what they have and takes back at the same time, so the other has the space he needs.” The acting coach, who also works as a horse trainer and coach to promote proper handling of animals (www.reitenundrelaxen.de), explains, how this work can help a relationship: “A horse only follows, when you tell it what you want with absolute certainty. Applied to the handling of your partner, that means that one should communicate one’s wishes without complicated detours and strategies: This is what I want, this is my goal, and I’d like it if you could support me in this.” After all, power struggles ensue when one can’t comprehend the actions of another, and feels neglected. The clearer you can formulate your wishes, the easier it is for your partner to deal with them and even find the benefits”, says Ulrich Wessel.

With power couples, of course, power struggles build a central theme, because both have success, money and privileges in excess, and the balance of love can easily be tipped, Lauren Frances observes. For the stars it’s even worse: “Celebrities constantly have to prove to the whole world that they’re the best and most beautiful. They often bring their competitive spirit into the partnership. Suddenly it’s about who makes more money. Who has more influence? Who is adored more? Many celebrity couples are busy measuring their strengths.” Of course any couple can get stuck in such an ongoing battle, when both are spoiled by success in business and in their private lives. The fact that both partners know exactly what they want doesn’t make every-day life any easier. Because everyone has a tendency to bring another argument to the table, instead of leaving well enough alone – which absolutely would be a sign of strength. You can only escape such power struggles by wielding your weapons internally. A trick of relationship experts, which may help, is to let an argument end kindly: Before or during a discussion, repeat quietly like a mantra “Our relationship is not a state of war, my partner is not my enemy. We are on the same side!”

To keep a discussion from escalating, one should be clear what the true issue is. Is it about more money, flirting and power? “Even if it seems petty or trite, such conflicts arise in all relationships on occasion”, explains psychologist, couples counselor and author Ursula Nuber (*Was Paare wissen müssen. 10 Grundregeln für das Leben zu zweit*, Krüger, 13,90 Euro). But often things are taken to a partner, that have nothing to do with him, only with one’s self. Not seldom it’s one’s own needs, doubts and deficits, that lurk behind psycho-duels. « When a woman believes, for example, that her partner won’t notice what all she is capable of and accomplishes, she potentially won’t reveal enough of her true talents. Maybe, because her work or life environment doesn’t suit her capabilities. Experts also know: Those who constantly demand validation from a partner, don’t give themselves enough of it. Ursula Nuber: “It’s possibly caused by performance pressure from childhood. The woman learned as a small girl that you only get love and praise from adults, when you do something extraordinary.” The woman has to resolve this conflict herself, by learning to meet her own needs – for whatever. Of course it’s much easier to project unexperienced and unfulfilled things onto a partner, instead of owning responsibility for your own luck. But there’s no other way to get what you truly need. And only then can the power-effect for the relationship develop. Ursula Nuber: “When you start to support yourself, then you automatically get more support and attention from your partner, because he can give it freely.”

But how do I find out what my and my partner’s true needs are? Love Coach Lauren Frances suggests a wish list. “Sit down together in a relaxed moment and write down what you need this moment, and what your partner desires.” A classic love trap is for instance the differing need for social contact. One might prefer to cuddle at home a lot, and the other wants to go out frequently and have little adventures. Lauren Frances knows: below this conflict is a very different issue, and that’s the differing need for closeness and distance. “This revelation and the concrete description of your various wishes are the first steps to finding a solution”, so says Lauren Frances. After that it’s about negotiating and finding compromises. Couples counselor Ursula Nuber suggests: “Agree, for example, that everyone reserves two evenings during the week for him- or herself, and that you’ll spend the weekend together.” If the partner doesn’t adhere to the rule, a possible consequence should be clearly outlined. “It’s ok to say that you see a danger to the relationship, if one doesn’t stick to the rules. Of course in a factual tone and without accusations, because that shows weakness”, emphasizes the couples counselor. The seriousness of the situation must be clear, agrees Lauren Frances: “If everyone only enforces their own agenda, then after a while you stop living in a relationship, and move into a roommate situation.”

Too little time for each other isn’t usually a lack of commitment for most couples, but due to outside influences, believe the experts. Many are very busy with work and have to deal with extreme stress. When they come home they want peace and quiet, and not to have to care for others. Ursula Nuber is certain: »the real problem often lies in the fact that most partners are different time types – one is an early rise, the other a night owl – or that both want to spend their free time relaxing in different ways – one needs activities, the other complete silence.« A clear case of needs-collision. And how do you solve this problem? It’s best to collect the individual wishes and offer each other a solution. For acting coach and horse trainer Ulrich Wessel, this is very important: to view time spent together as something absolutely positive. “Strengths you develop together must be nurtured somehow. That’s why you should plan regular dates to re-charge the

relationship battery. You can't find a gap in your day planner for the life of you? Coordinate each other's appointments outside of work. That improves understanding for each other and opens new opportunities for free time, which can be taken advantage of together. That it's possible to push forward that appointment for the pedicure, is something that can be overlooked when there's a lot of stress. It's even better to find an activity or hobby that can be enjoyed by both, the acting coach suggests. The couple time is in contrast to the reflecting relationship work. It promotes shared emotional experiences. And for a treasure chest of memories from which one can draw renewed strength."

Jurate Baronas

“View your relationship as a job alliance.”

[LOVE COACH LAUREN FRANCES]