

Leave it at work. It will still be there in the morning. If it gets intense, go to a neutral place with a pen and paper and write down the pros and cons of the issue. Don't let anything fester.

"I've fired Greg 25 times, but never broke up with him once," Hammack says. "And he's done the same."

Dynamic Everyday Duo

Couple of florists: Linh and Eric Shaw
Labor of love: Everyday Flowers, Tustin, Calif.

Romance, retail, reality: The couple purchased the shop Everyday Flowers in Tustin, Calif., in 2003. Linh Shaw started working full-time immediately; Eric Shaw retained his previous job as a video game technician for a year, coming into the shop on nights and weekends. They have been married for almost nine years. No one on the six-person staff works fewer than 20 hours a week. Both Linh and Eric work full-time.

Linh had considerable industry experience when they opened. In high school, she had worked in retail shops and she continued working in shops through college. Then she felt the need to try her hand at something else and moved into the mortgage industry, but when the couple started feeling an entrepreneurial itch to own their own business, Linh headed back into the world of flowers. The transition was invigorating and challenging.

"I had management experience with the different shops I'd worked in, but (as the owner) it was definitely harder," she says. "Design-wise, I had all the experience."

For Eric, who had no experience within the industry, the transition was even more daunting.

"When I came into this, it wasn't like I said, 'Where do I start learning how to design?'" Eric explains. "I had to try and figure out, 'Where is the best place for me to fit in?' We had to create everything from scratch, from learning the basics of how to bill our customers to understanding how the wire service works."



Six years later, the pair seemed to have gotten the hang of things. Excluding the final months of 2008 — when bad economic news drove consumer spending to a halt — Everyday Flowers was seeing double-digit total sales increases, every month. And even in those tough months, the shop's Web site sales grew by about 10 percent every month.

"We really are the dynamic duo," Linh says.

Division of labor: Since Day One, the division of labor at Everyday Flowers has been clear. Eric handles the paperwork and the shop's Web site, a major task considering their site is not template-based and the content and design is "100 percent done" by Eric, Linh says. Linh coordinates designs, purchasing, special events and employee management. There is some crossover. Eric delves into the creative side and can guide customers through consultations — although Linh often jumps in to help out.



"Customers love Eric," Linh says. "He sweetens them up, and I close the deal."

Eric also acts as the face of the company and the mastermind behind some of its most out-of-the-box marketing and advertising ventures. A year and a half ago, for instance, the Shaws launched a YouTube.com channel and posted commercials and information. Eric's also most often on industry sites, including flowerchat.com, networking, researching or doling out information of his own.

"We cover each other's backs," Eric says. "(Most of the time), we're side-by-side, step-by-step with each other. For whatever reason, we think so much alike that it is very easy for us to come together and complete the decision. I don't know that many people like that."

Rules of engagement: The Shaws have a son, 7, and a daughter, 4. They've never established rules about when and where family business ends and professional life begins because "sometimes our best brainstorming is at 3 a.m.," Linh says. And at work, where the couple employs Linh's cousin as manager and head designer, it isn't a big deal when family issues arise.

"We're very open with employees," Linh says. "They see our kids every week."

Linh and Eric do try to reserve Sunday as a "no-work" zone, with the exception being large wedding or funeral work. That's a decision the couple came to over time, naturally, if not inevitably. At one point the Shaws had considered moving their business to their home to save on rent, but worried that if they made that move, they'd lose something more valuable: time away from work.

We can work it out: Like many couples who live and work together, the Shaws worry over "having all of our finances tied to one thing," Linh says.

"If we both weren't working here, there would be a break," Linh says. "If the shop is doing well, it's hunky-dory. If not, it can put a stress on the relationship."

The couple has occasionally toyed with the idea of splitting up professionally — of someone setting off into another job with a set salary. But in the end, running the shop involves their shared vision, and they like operating as a team. When disagreements do arise, Eric says both he and Linh tend to be pragmatic and drama-free.

"Linh and I come up with our own ideas," Eric says. "We'll talk about the pros and cons. Usually the person coming up with the idea will argue for it, then the other one will give (his or her opinion), and then we'll evaluate."

For richer, for poorer: While sales at Everyday Flowers are still strong, the Shaws are working hard to stay ahead of the curve. Their immediate area has been hard hit: 10 local shops closed in the past two years.

"We can sit down and look through so many ideas to get us through," Eric says. "We're both thinking about the business, 24/7. The most important

thing is figuring out something that no one else is doing."

What Eric has taught Linh: The Web matters — and a person willing to put in the time to get a Web presence right is invaluable. "If I had to replace Eric, I would have to pay someone like \$60,000 to \$75,000 a year to do what he does, maybe more," Linh says.

What Linh has taught Eric: Quality and consistency are paramount. "She's taught that it's important that things are properly done, from the way the stems are cut to how they go into the arrangement," Eric says.

Best advice to other couples: Give each other the space they need. Don't micromanage. Give the person with the stronger abilities the responsibilities. 🌿

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