

Startup Life

Brad Feld and Amy Batchelor—2013.

Chapter two: Philosophy

- Set automatic reminders to monthly write L love note in your very own handwriting and put it in the mail.
- Some of them are physical, such as Brads requiring that the couches we have be ones he can lie down on sweaty after a run even though he doesn't care what they look like or want to be involved in picking them out. Or that we have fancy magic Toto toilets that wash and dry you after you do your thing so he doesn't have to shower after going to the bathroom. Yet others are emotional, like Brad's needing 90 minutes of quiet time in the morning to wake up. Within your partnership, as at your company being able to effectively delegate tasks rather than needing to be involved in every decision improves efficiency and gives each partner regions of autonomous decision making. Knowing the things each partner really cares about, and being able to accommodate for that, is extremely powerful.

Chapter 3: communication.

- Four minutes in the morning.
- A good morning and the good night call.
- Life dinner.
- Honesty and respect.
- During these conflict situations, we've learned to use "I" language instead of blaming, "you" language.
- Although it may sound idyllically happy to be a couple that "never fights," it's almost always a sign of avoiding talking about troubled topics and not the result of complete accord and unity with each other. It takes courage to express unhappiness and to bring up issues that may feel more natural for you to sweep under the rug. An advantage to having frequent open communication times is that you develop good patterns of addressing conflict in a healthy way before things really build up to an ugly stage.
- (See www.acestudy.org for more on this topic)

Chapter 4: startup company life.

- <http://moz.com/rand/diving-deep-on-tagfee>
- Another source of help can be professional coaching. A close friend of ours, Jerry Colonna, is an entrepreneur, former venture capitalist, and professional executive life coach who blogs at The Monster in Your Head {www.themonsterinyourhead.com/} and leads online workshops at Cojourneo <http://cojourneo.com>)

Chapter 5: personality.

- When someone gives him praise or positive feedback, he hears it and is gracious, but it has little to no impact on his motivational structure. However, if you learn something, it's incredibly motivating to him.
- Amy shares this thirst for learning, but appreciates a pat on the back and the Gold star a lot more. The absence of this demotivating to her, but too much praise is also demotivating, as she interprets it as insincere and subsequently she values it
- To this day, I don't know why that was impossible. But I'd ask him to find the shoes and put them on our daughter, only to come downstairs to find them cuddled on the couch watching the Teletubbies. The shoes were nowhere in sight. Once I accepted that he was no help in the mornings, but was great at baths and story time before bed, everybody's life got a lot easier!
- There's a delightful scene in the movie *White Men Can't Jump*. In it, Billy Hoyle (played by Woody Harrelson) and Gloria Clemente (played by Rosie Perez) are in bed together. Gloria says to Billy, "Honey, I'm thirsty." Billy gets up without saying word, goes to the kitchen, and fills up a glass of water. Brings it back to the bed, and gives it to Gloria. As Billy is crawling back into bed, Gloria tosses the water in his face. Startled, Billy says, "What?!" A long conversation ensues, which can be summarized as, "Honey, when I say I'm thirsty, I don't want a glass of water. I want empathy. I want you to say, I know what it's like to be thirsty."
- In our relationship, this scene has become shorthand for understanding whether a situation requires problem solving or empathy. When Amy States a problem or brings up an issue, Brad's natural tendency is to kick into problem-solving mode. Often, Amy just wants empathy, but instead of struggling to communicate this, she'll often just say, "Honey, I want a glass of water." This is the signal to Brad that Amy doesn't want her problem solved. But instead wants empathy and connection. Sometimes you just want to feel like someone hears and understands you and that you're not crazy or alone in the absurd and indifferent universe. Ideally, your partner can provide either problem solving or empathy in different contexts, and it's helpful if you take responsibility for communicating what mode you're in.

Chapter 6: values.

- "people are still expected to provide reasons not to have children, but no reasons are required to have them" <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/17>

Chapter 7: skills, tactics and tools.

- If you aren't looking at her, you can't tell that she's furiously thinking about whatever is going on. But if you look at her, you see it in her eyes. The code phrase for these situations became "talk to me." When Brad first started saying this, it 'often generated more anger or upset, and often resulted in tears. But over time, it became a safe phrase meaning "just say what's on your mind—I won't judge, I won't react, I will just listen." When the words start tumbling out, Brad just listens. And listens. And listens. And when the words are out, he doesn't try to solve the problem; instead, whatever he says is a clear reflection that he heard the words
- In an era before cell phones, email, and text messages, Amy would often be stranded at a fancy restaurant waiting for Brad to show up. Brad believed he could travel across any geography the way Jack Bauer travels around LA—he can get anywhere in 10 minutes regardless of distance or time of day. We have many stories of Brad's inconsiderate behavior on this front, almost always

justified by something that came up, but ultimately signaling that Amy was a lower priority than the other things going on

Chapter 8: common issues and conflicts.

Chapter 9: big issues, illness, relationship failure and divorce.

Chapter 10: money

Chapter 11: children

- **I was fat and happy** in a great job at a large media/technology company when we had our first child. It was nice to have that cushion when going through that initial birth; lots of flexibility (financial and time) to try and bring this kid into the world “right.” However, as he started to grow and become more person-like, I found myself telling him things about life. “Take risk!” I’d encourage him to push through boundaries (ride a bike). I’d encourage him to push through pain. I’d shown him beautiful moments. But then, when I looked at my life, I wasn’t walking the talk. I was a big company executive with as lazy a lifestyle as you could imagine. I imagined my child growing older and ultimately asking me what I did for work. I vividly painted that picture, that moment, and the exchange. I realized that my response was going to be anything but great. “Son, I’m 35, I work a few hours a week, bike ride a lot, fly around the world sometimes, and make a lot of money.” Effectively, “I’m retired.”
- In the vein of wanting to set a good example for my kids, my wife and I agreed to keep pushing down this startup path. We kept coming back to the value we as individuals, as well as our kids, would get from the experience, and it was exceedingly high. We believe the old model of “go to school, go to college. Go get a great job” is broken, and that we needed to exemplify, as best we could. New alternative ways of doing. We want our kids to see innovation firsthand. We want them to see challenges stared down and beaten with bare hands (not abstracted away by the more traditional career path system). We want them to see problem solving in the real world. We want them to see their parents cope through the ups and the downs. These things drive us, as a couple, to participate directly in the startup ecosystem.
- Don’t over schedule. From the outside, this seems incredibly easy, but three of the people I spoke with spend two to three hours most evenings driving their kids to after-school activities.
- Kidding aside, parents are led to believe that if their child isn’t participating in multiple after-school activities that they are somehow failing them and they will grow up to be un-athletic outcasts. One of the least frantic people I polled (who runs her own company) limits the activities to one.
- Don’t try to do everything perfectly.
- This is the single most important piece of advice I have: it’s good to have an interest or hobby outside of your family and work

Chapter 12: family

Chapter 13: sex and romance

- Don’t try to force your view of what you think is romantic on your partner.