

Pre-Partnership Exercises

Many religions require couples to go through pre-marriage counseling to determine whether they're compatible as a couple. While there is no requirement for you to do similar pre-work before you jump into a partnership, you should still determine if you're compatible as business partners.

These questions will help you determine whether partnership is suitable. You want to dive into each others' values and see if there are any red flags that might signal partnership isn't the right fit.

Use these questions as a guide when looking into a potential partnership. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, they will just help you figure out whether the partner you are considering would be a good fit.



Step 1: Get Clear on What You're Looking For

You have to first know what you're looking for out of a partnership so you can find the right fit.

Answer these questions to get more clarity around your goals.

1. What am I trying to achieve with this partnership? What problems am I trying to solve or what opportunities am I trying to take advantage of?

2. What would be a dealbreaker for me (in terms of behavior, financial situation, working style, ethics) in a potential partner?

3. What core values and other cultural aspects must this person and their firm have to be a good cultural fit for our firm?

4. What aspects would make a potential partner a bad cultural fit for our firm?

5. What personal and professional goals are most important to me? How would a potential partner help support me in these?



Step 2: Determining Partner Alignment

Much like with marriage, it's less costly and less painful if you can pinpoint potential red flags and cut the cord now, before you take the plunge.

Answer the following questions to determine whether you and your partner are aligned. Then share your answers and discuss with your coach, or someone else, to summarize conclusions.

Goals & Services

1. Your top three goals (for this partnership/relationship) are:



2. How will this partner help you reach those goals?

3. What is your value proposition to clients?

4. What key services do you provide?



5. What makes your firm unique among the other players in the space?

6. Who are the leadership and other key individuals at your company?

7. How long have you been in the financial planning profession?


Vision

1. What kind of company are you trying to build?

What causes are important to you? How do you want your business to support those causes?

What are your deepest values? How do you want your business to stand for those values?

Do you consider your business a mission or purpose-driven company?



What kind of impact do you want to have on your employees' lives?

What kind of impact do you want to have on your community?

What do you want your business to be known for?

What do you want to personally be known for?

What kind of awards or recognition would you want your company to receive in the future?

What kind of company would you want your children to work for?

What would “success” look like to you in business?

- 2. Where do you want your organization to be 10 years from now? This should be a BHAG – big, hairy, audacious goal.**



What is your annual revenue at this point?

What is your AUM?

How many clients are you serving?

What kinds of services are you providing to your clients?

What does your team look like? How many people? How does the team work together to serve clients? What is your role?

What is the most impactful “thank you” you’ve received from a client at this point?

What kind of goal gets you EXCITED?

3. What's your vision for your own personal life?

What do you want people to say about you? Your spouse, your kids, your coworkers, friends, etc.

How do you want to spend your time 10 years from now?

What kind of environment do you want to live and work in?

What would you do if you weren't afraid?

Philosophy

1. What is your overall wealth management/financial planning philosophy?
2. What's behind that wealth management/financial planning philosophy? Where do your beliefs come from?



3. What's your overall investment management philosophy?

4. What's behind that investment philosophy? Where do your beliefs come from?

5. How does the market performance impact your investment philosophy or management style?

6. How do you describe your investment philosophy to clients?

7. What would cause you to change your investment philosophy or management style?

8. What's your overall leadership and people management philosophy?

9. What's behind that leadership and people management philosophy? Where do your beliefs come from?

10. What's your overall business philosophy? (Ex: Purpose is to maximize profit, to serve others, etc.)

11. What's behind that business philosophy? Where do your beliefs come from?

Partnership Expectations

1. How do you feel this partnership team can best leverage each individual's strengths?

2. How will you define what "fair" contributions by each partner are in your business?

3. How do you feel business partners should be accountable to each other?




4. How do you feel business decisions should be made in your partnership?

5. How should personnel (team) decisions be made in your partnership?

6. When there are disagreements between partners, how should they be handled?

7. What are some absolute “deal-breakers” for you in a business partnership?



8. Do you have plans for children/grandchildren/others to join your business or take over your shares of the business someday?

9. If your partner had plans to bring children into the business and shift equity to them, how would that change your perceptions of the partnership?

10. How are you going to handle business finances? Will you outsource accounting functions?

11. When there's profit, how often should it be distributed?

12. If in the future the partnership isn't working out, how should the partnership be dissolved? Who owns the clients? Should one partner buy the other out?



Step 3: Due Diligence Questions to Ask Each Other


Doing your due diligence means diving into the details about your potential partner's company and personal values. It means asking personal questions that may make you or your potential partner uncomfortable. But you need to ask them anyway.

It's also imperative to spend time with your potential partner in social and professional settings to get to know them on a more personal level.

Take some time to answer these questions to get more background on your potential partner.

Company Culture & Values

1. What are your company's core values? List of three ways those values show up in your organization:



7. What is the most common positive feedback you hear from partners, employees and clients?

8. What is the most common negative feedback you hear from partners, employees and clients?

9. What do you do with the feedback you gather? Give examples.

10. What kinds of firms fit well with your culture?

11. What makes a firm a bad cultural fit?

A Deeper Dive

1. Do you have or have you had any compliance issues in the past?
2. Do you have any current client issues that could become a problem?
3. Do you have any other pending lawsuits or other legal issues?
4. Have you been divorced or are you currently in the process of getting divorced?
5. Are you prepared to make legal arrangements – such as trusts – to form a legal partnership?

3. List three people you respect or, if you could have them on your team, would lead you to incredible business success and happiness.

4. List the characteristics that these people embody. What qualities do they exemplify? What do they do that puts them on a list? Make this a good, lengthy list. To help, here's some examples of real-world core values:

- Unequivocal excellence
- Continually strives for perfection
- Wins
- Does the right thing
- Compassion
- Honesty and integrity
- Hungry for achievement
- Is enthusiastic and energetic
- Tenacious and competitive
- Encourages individual ability and creativity
- Maintains accountability
- Services the customer above all else
- Works hard
- Is never satisfied
- Is interested in continuous self-improvement
- Helps first
- Exhibits professionalism
- Growth-oriented
- Treats everyone with respect
- Provides opportunity based on merit
- Motivated by solving problems
- Has creativity, dreams and imagination
- Has personal integrity
- Is fun

5. If you had to narrow down this list to your top 5-7, what would those be? What makes each important in a team?



Step 5: Wrap-Up

1. What are your top 3-5 takeaways after doing this exercise? Summarize those here:

