

## **Partnership in Action**

Andrew L. Miser, Ph.D.  
Elysian Enterprises  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Martha F. Miser, M.A.  
ING Group  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Partnership in action expresses the way in which committed couples participate in realizing the quality of life that they envision together. This paper will present ideas about how committed couples can work in partnership in their lives. Specifically, this paper will present a way to think about the process of partnership itself as couples repeatedly invent their lives together and then take action. A particular way of co-inventing the future and of working together to bring that the future into existence will be presented. Also, a powerful method of working together to plan the actions and accomplishments within a project technology will be outlined. When partners in living engage in partnership projects designed to make their co-created future real in their lives they are expressing partnership in action. Partnership projects are an expression of the co-created contexts of commitment, alignment, listening, play and appreciation. Partnership projects express a couple's core values and the vision for their partnership being expressed in the world. Such projects fulfill possibility, partnership and passion for partners in living.

Partnership in action expresses the way in which committed couples participate in realizing the kind of life that they envision together. The life that a couple co-creates is a reflection of what is important to them. It is an expression of their partnership, their passion for living and the possibilities they see for their lives. Being partners in action fulfills their co-invented future, reflects the central values of their relationship and ultimately strengthens the foundation of their partnership.

Miser and Miser (2006) presented the Partners in Living model that is a paradigm for generating possibility, partnership and passion in a committed relationship. The Partners in Living model of committed relationship is focused on the quality of a couple's partnership. The model rests on the perspective that partners in living are two persons who see themselves as equals and who commit to forming a long-term alliance, relationship or marriage for the purpose of living together in the fulfillment of possibility,

partnership and passion. The five co-created contexts for the Partners in Living paradigm are commitment, alignment, listening, play and appreciation.

This paper will present ideas about how committed couples can work together to fulfill the context of partnership in their lives. How does a couple express their commitment to their partnership in the world? How do they align on their values, their vision, their future and the actions they take to fulfill their lives? What are they listening for as they plan and fulfill their dreams? How do they learn to bring playfulness to their activities over the course of a lifetime? What do accomplishment and appreciation provide a couple on their journey together?

Specifically, this paper will present a way to think about the process of partnership itself as couples repeatedly invent their lives together and then take action over the course of their lifetime. A specific way of co-inventing the future and of working together to bring short-term and long-term images of the future into existence will be presented. Also, a powerful way of working together to plan the actions and accomplishments within a project technology will be outlined. When partners in living engage in projects designed to make their co-created future real in their lives, they are expressing partnership in action. This paper will discuss the processes of designing and managing partnership projects that give couples access to being powerful partners in action.

### **The Tao of Partnership**

The “Tao” is Chinese for “the way.” For partners in living, there is a natural flow in which effective action tends to move. Two partners come together and plan an activity, create an idea, invent a vision or design a project. After co-creating some aspect of their lives, they move into action. They participate together, they collaborate, they cooperate in their venture and they fulfill their plans. Then, after taking action, they jointly look at what they have accomplished and what results they now have in their lives.

*The Tao of partners in living is the processes of co-creation, cooperation and co-ownership.* The prefix, “co,” in front of the words “creation,” “operation” and “ownership” means “together, with, joint or equally.” The prefix refers to two people jointly engaged in the activities of creating, operating and owning with each other and as equals.

The act of co-creation could be seen as a pre-requisite for true partnership. From the first day that two people who form a relationship meet, they are co-creating their relationship. At different points in their relationship, when they date exclusively, when they become engaged and when they get married, two people are co-creating their lives by giving and receiving their word to each other. In this way, they co-create their relationship by making declarations and promises to each other.

Over time, couples honor what they co-create by continually recommitting themselves to their relationship and by taking action that not only expresses the values and vision of their relationship, but also fulfills the future they see for themselves. They see what they have in their lives as an expression of the quality of their partnership. Couples in true partnership co-create their lives, cooperate in their daily lives with one another and co-own life together. Over their life span, partners in living express their partnership repeatedly through the processes of co-creation, cooperation and co-ownership.

### **Values: The Heart and Soul of “Couple-ness”**

The foundation of a partnership rests on a set of shared values that guide the partners’ actions in life together. The values a couple shares can be seen as intrinsic to their “couple-ness.” These values reflect the very heart and soul of their relationship. Some couples value mutual understanding, validation, communication, openness, compromise and friendship. Other couples value the freedom to express different viewpoints, emotional expressiveness and passion. Still other couples value minimizing conflict, sharing common ground, harmony and autonomy. Couples who co-create their values can be very successful over the long-term (Gottman, 1994).

When a couple is able to co-create and share the values of their partnership, they are expressing what fulfills their relationship (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998). Co-creating one’s values is often as simple as acknowledging what is already “there” at the core of relationship. The couple is able to see and then articulate, in words, actions and outcomes, what is important to them as a couple.

Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl (1998) wrote that a valued life is a fulfilling life and living such a life is a “radical act.” When one thinks of the word “radical,” one thinks of going to an extreme, but this is not what is meant in this context. The dictionary definition of “radical,” as an adjective, is “of or from the root or roots; going to the center, foundation or source of something; fundamental or basic, as a *radical* principle.” Couples who articulate and generate their central values are able to co-create the foundation of their relationship on an on-going basis and are able to share their “couple-ness” with others. Their alignment is evident and contributes quietly and gently to everyone with whom they touch. As partners in living, their gift is giving the possibility and value of “couple-ness” to others.

### **Vision: The Possibility of Partnership**

A second area where partners in living co-create their lives is when they are articulating a vision for their lives and their relationship. A vision conveys what a couple wants to express in life as the fulfillment of their partnership. It is not just the achievement of life goals or objectives. A vision for the relationship represents what a couple stands for

together in the world. A vision could be thought of as a co-created stand for the quality of living that touches others around them. This quality of living is an expression of the couple's values and what they deem as important for themselves.

To envision is "to picture in the mind or to imagine something not yet in existence." Vision is often associated with organizational change as it is well recognized that a powerful vision is crucial to inspiring and motivating people and providing a direction and a mindset for success (Miser, 2006). Similarly, partners in living co-envision or co-imagine the desired quality of life together and, standing in that vision, co-create their lives to bring that vision into reality. When thinking about a committed couple on their journey together over the course of their life span, it is easy to see the value for the couple being able to co-create a vision for their partnership on a renewable and periodic basis.

Martha Miser (2006) articulates the six "Golden Rules" of vision that hold as true for a committed couple or a "partnership of two," as they do for a multinational corporation. These "Golden Rules" as applied to partners in living are:

- A vision is purposely and consciously co-created by the couple
- A vision is a flexible and dynamic process
- A vision is always about greatness
- A vision is both future focused and grounded in reality
- A vision does not tell the couple how to get there
- A successful vision is shared by the couple

Zander and Zander (2000) distinguish "vision" in their book on personal and professional transformation, The Art of Possibility, as articulating possibility, fulfilling a fundamental desire of humankind, making no reference to morality or ethics, and being a freestanding and timeless picture. A vision co-created by a committed couple is their stand for the kind of world they are committed to co-creating as an expression of their partnership. It might be expressed as a set of descriptive phrases that capture the essence of life itself. Presented below is an example of such a vision as expressed by one couple. They entitled the vision of their partnership, "Our World."

Visionary, inspired leadership  
Big sky, nature calling forth the human spirit  
Powerful, natural beauty  
Wonderment and mystery  
Appreciating history  
Respect and tolerance  
Healing, wholeness, and forgiveness  
Joy, music and dancing  
Grace  
Self-expression, magnificence and adventure

## No one left out

Co-creating the foundational values of one's "couple-ness" and co-creating a vision for which the couple stands are powerful ways to have partnership expressed in the world. Standing on that foundation, the couple is able to powerfully co-create their future.

### **The Merlin Principle: Co-creating the Future**

A third way in which partners in living co-create their lives is by inventing a future for their partnership. To create the future, a couple first anchors themselves in what they value and in the vision for their relationship. Then, like painters making broad strokes on a blank canvas, the couple shares about what they see for their future. When engaged in this activity, a couple first envisions images of their future, irrespective of time. They examine all the areas of their life, such as their home, family, friends, community, work, career, retirement, play, recreation and health. Their shared images might include, "Have three grown children," "Own a colonial home in a city in the Northeast," "Drive a BMW Roadster," "Have a book published," "Travel to all corners of the world," "Have joint business ventures working with individuals, couples and organizations," etc.

As the couple shares their images of the future, they step into those future images and experience what it is like having that future be real and manifested in the world. Where is the couple living? How does it feel for the couple? What do they experience? What does it look like? What is it that lights the couple up about what they imagine? As the couple stands in the future they are co-creating, they are using the same abilities that Merlin the Magician used as mentor to the great King Arthur of the Round Table. Merlin had an uncanny ability to see and know the future before it would occur. Such a view from the future gave Merlin extraordinary insights into what would happen in the present and what actions he would advise King Arthur to take. This "Merlin Factor"<sup>1</sup> has been identified as central to the effectiveness of corporate leaders and the success of a corporation's strategic intent (Smith, 1994). "The essence of the Merlin Factor process... is simply stated: what you choose for your future is more important than what you know about your past or present capabilities"<sup>2</sup>

The process of standing together and co-envisioning images of the future gives a couple the magic wand of Merlin the Magician. The "Merlin Principle"<sup>3</sup> applied to partners in living is the phenomenon of looking as a couple from the future to the present time which

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, C.E. (1994) *The Merlin Factor: Leadership and Strategic Intent*. Business Strategy Review, 5(1), Oxford University Press, pp.67.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The authors wish to thank Raymond Ter Bogt, a friend and colleague, who personally introduced them to the power of the "Merlin Principle."

allows them to see, feel and sense their future in a clear and tangible way. This shared world is theirs to co-create, to cooperate in taking action toward and to co-own.

Once these images have been shared and experienced as a possible desired future, the couple can choose and align on a timeframe for the manifestation of the future they have co-created. They can choose a timeframe of 25 years, 15 years, 10 years, 5 years or 2 years. Standing together in their co-invented future, the couple can view the path from the future to the present moment and see clearly what actions they took and what they accomplished along the way. They can also see when those actions and accomplishments occurred. Working from the future (say, 25 years out) to the present time, the couple articulates, in a timeline, the milestones, accomplishments and the actions that naturally occurred on the path to their future.

Committing together to the future they have co-created is essential for being partners in action. Almost immediately after making this commitment, the couple will see a host of “partnership projects” needed to fulfill on the future they have envisioned. Partners in living become partners in action when they undertake these partnership projects as an expression of their commitment to their articulated future. The next section will present a technology for couples to use in co-designing partnership projects over time.

### **Partnership Projects: Being Partners in Action**

Czeslaw Milosz said, “To undertake a project, as the word’s derivation indicates, means to cast an idea out ahead of itself so that it gains autonomy and is fulfilled not only by the originator, but, indeed, independently of him as well.”<sup>4</sup> Partnership projects are a means for couples to get into action and fulfill on their ideas. In this way, their partnership is expressed in everyday life.

Partnership projects are distinct from the normal “routine” of life as they are co-created by the couple to bring their future into existence and co-owned for the duration of the project. Partnership projects can be created in any area of life, such as home improvement, financial well-being, children/family, career, education, community or vacation and travel. Projects are designed to be time limited and have a specific measurable result.

Within these projects, partners cooperate together in planned action and they co-own their accomplishments. They hold themselves accountable for how they relate to each other, what they actually do and the outcomes (both intended and unintended) of the project. As they proceed, the couple shares any unwitting and disempowering perspectives they may have, identifies the remaining actions that need to be taken and

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<sup>4</sup> Czeslaw, M. (1983) *Visions of San Francisco Bay*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux

acknowledges their accomplishments. By co-owning the results of projects along the way, the couple is able to re-create their partnership and stay in action.

After co-creating their future using the Merlin principle, a couple will find that many projects will start to appear on their joint “radar screen”. When co-creating projects and bringing them to fruition, couples will find that there are several necessary steps to co-designing a successful partnership project. The couple will also discover that, throughout the life of their project(s), they must meet periodically so they can evaluate the results of their actions, plan the next steps of their projects and be in alignment on a regular basis. The following are steps to co-create a partnership project:

- **Co-create the future accomplishment of the partnership project.** To create a project, the couple designs the accomplishment of the project by writing it down in the following way “Our project is to have (an accomplishment) by (specific time).” It is important that the statement is as specific as possible. For example, “Our project is to have our daughter and her fiancé married in a beautiful loving ceremony in July, 2005, with 180 people in attendance.” Or, “Our project is to have traveled to 10 major cities in Europe in the next four years.” Each project is stated as an expression of the future that the couple is co-creating together, using the Merlin principle. By stating the project in this way, the couple is aligned in what they are building for the future.
- **Identify the shared current perspectives and concerns that frame the project.** The next step in designing a project is to identify any disempowering shared or individual perspectives or concerns that might unwittingly shape the couple’s relationship to the project. Such unwitting perspectives might be, “This project is going to be a lot of work and hard to accomplish.” Or, “This project will take a lot of our free time.” Or, “This project is going to put a lot of stress on our family.” Or, “We are afraid we won’t communicate well.” Or, “The costs of the project will get out of control.” Or, “We are going to get in over our heads.” By identifying such current perspectives, concerns, worries, perceived barriers or anticipated obstacles, the couple is able to be responsible for and shift, if necessary, their current view or framework. The next step is to create an empowering perspective or context for the partnership project in which every concern or obstacle can then be viewed, discussed, explored and resolved within a shared empowering perspective.
- **Brainstorm other empowering perspectives and choose a powerful way of being for the partnership project.** The next step of designing a partnership project is to brainstorm a number of different perspectives that could frame the

project. A brainstorming tool for couples to use for this process is the Partnership Umbrella exercise<sup>5</sup> as described below:

1. Together, imagine creating a pentagon, hexagon or even an octagon on the floor in front of you. It appears as the top of an umbrella. In the center of the umbrella is the stated project accomplishment (intended outcome and by when). Together, stand in one of the frames of the umbrella. That frame will be your initial “current perspective” of the project’s future accomplishment. First, identify that current perspective. What is it like for the two of you? What do you each experience? What do you feel? How do you view your project’s future accomplishment through that perspective? Be aware of that perspective and it’s impact on your life. Name that current perspective.
2. Move to another frame of the umbrella that will simply represent another perspective to view your project. Invent another perspective from which to view that partnership project. Look from that new perspective and say how the project looks to you from this new perspective. What is it like for you in this perspective? What do you experience? Articulate what that new perspective is like. Be aware of that perspective and the possible impact on your project. Name that perspective.
3. Invent five to eight new perspectives from which to view your project by stepping into different frames in the umbrella. Name each of them as you go. As you engage in this exercise, write the names of the various perspectives, including the current perspective on the Umbrella sheet (See Appendix 1).
4. Together choose a perspective that empowers you and that you are willing to take on in your project. Stand in that new perspective and look at what that is like for both of you. Share what it is like for you being in this new perspective. Note: If you each choose a different perspective, have that be OK. Simply put the two perspectives together, imagine marrying them into one whole perspective and then name the new joint perspective that includes both perspectives that were chosen.
5. Stand in this new perspective you both have just chosen. Make two lists:  
“What are you jointly saying ‘yes’ to?” and “What are you saying ‘no’ to?”  
This is an inquiry that focuses directly on what you as a couple are

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<sup>5</sup> The Partnership Umbrella exercise is an adaptation of the Balance Wheel exercise used in co-active coaching. The model of co-active coaching is taught through the Coaches Training Institute in San Raphael, California. This model of coaching is presented in Whitworth, L., Kimsey-House, H, & Sandahl, P. (1998) *Co-active coaching: New skills for coaching people towards success in work and in life*. Palo Alto, California: Davies-Black Publishing.



committing yourself to. It is a powerful way to be in alignment about what you want to have in your lives.

6. Look at how committed you are to the new perspective and to your list of commitments you have just created. Ask the yourselves: "On a scale of 1-10, how committed are we to our new perspective?" Align as a couple. If you say less than 10, ask yourselves: "What will it take to make our commitment to our new perspective a 10?" If you both are committed at a 10, you can challenge yourself at another level: "What would make our commitment a 15?"
  7. When you experience being at a 10 with your commitment to your new perspective, make the commitment by stepping over a line. Draw an imaginary line on the floor that represents the distinction between "Staying with the current perspective" and "Stepping into the new perspective for the project." Commit to your new perspective by stepping out over the line into a new context. You can say as you step, "We are committed to being this new perspective in our project at all times."
  8. Design all the aspects of the partnership project (outlined in the next sections) inside of this co-created and empowering new perspective.
- **Create the actions and the interim accomplishments necessary to fulfill the partnership project and put them into time.** At this point in the project design, the couple stands together in the empowering perspective for the project, are clear about what they are saying 'yes' to in their lives, and, using the Merlin Principle, they imagine themselves in the future accomplishment of the project. The couple then looks from the future accomplishment of the project to the present time. Starting from that future accomplishment working toward the present time, the couple brainstorms all the interim accomplishments that will occur during the project and all the actions that will be taken inside the project. As they do, they put the actions and accomplishment in a timeline from the fulfillment of the project to the present time.

One project timeline format that is useful is to have two columns: Date and Actions/Accomplishments. In the timeline, now working from the present to the future accomplishment of the project, the couple lists, in sequence, the specific dates (day or week of), and the actions and accomplishments that will occur on that day or during that week. This recommended format is presented in Appendix 2 with the design of a small holiday party project. The couple, however, can invent and use whatever project format works for them.

- **Name the project.** The couple names the project. It is important that the couple aligns on a name and that the name expresses the project in a creative and self-

expressed way. The name can call forth the perspective of the project, the values and the vision of the couple or the future accomplishment of the project. The name of the project calls the future into existence. In the fictitious example in Appendix 2, the couple named their holiday party, “Joy to the World.”

- **Schedule the project meetings.** Once the partnership project is designed, the couple makes a plan to meet on a regular basis and determines the length of their project meetings. In the beginning, it is often wise for the couple to meet frequently, say once per week for an hour and a half or so, and then meet less frequently or as needed as the project progresses. Each couple will find what works for them as they engage in partnership projects.

In every project meeting, the couple starts with creating an agenda. It is in these project meetings where the couple can evaluate what they are accomplishing, recommit to their commitment and get into action to fulfill their future. Here is a recommended agenda for project meetings:

- What is our agenda? The couple co-creates the agenda for the project meeting before getting involved in the meeting content itself.
- What do we need to “let go of” to be in this project meeting? Here the couple simply communicates anything that they need to say so they can be fully present in the meeting.
- Who are we as a partnership? Here the couple can share their core values or express the vision of their relationship. This allows the couple to get powerfully related as partners in action as they review the status of their project.
- What are we creating in this partnership project? The couple briefly reviews the future accomplishment of the project.
- What have we accomplished? Each partner shares what they see has been accomplished since the last project meeting.
- What is our current perspective of this project? Another question that could be asked is: “Who have we been being about the project?” The couple shares anything they see that is a disempowering perspective, concern or obstacle to fulfilling the project.
- What is the empowering perspective that we co-created for this project? The couple can also ask themselves: “Who do we now declare ourselves to be with regard to this project?”

- What are the short-term actions and accomplishments that need to be taken or be focused on? At this point, the couple works with the project timeline, revising the timeframe, editing the actions and accomplishments and re-aligning aspects of the plan. (If the project timeline is on the computer, it can be easily and repeatedly updated and renewed). The couple discusses who will do what and by when. They also discuss how they want to be in communication with each other along the way. Some aspects of the project can wait to be discussed at the next project meeting while others need to be discussed on an ongoing basis.
- What do we acknowledge ourselves for? What do I (we) appreciate? The couple takes a few minutes to say anything to acknowledge their partnership or to appreciate each other's commitment, effort and/or actions related to fulfilling the project. Also, the couple says anything that returns them to being naturally creative, resourceful and whole.
- When will we meet again? The couple schedules another project meeting in their calendars.

### **Partnership Fulfilled**

As partners get into action after they have completed their initial project design, they will find that initially there is much to be done. Taking one step at a time without expecting big results right away will keep the couple from losing enthusiasm for what they are accomplishing. A lot of the early work requires focused action and being in regular communication about what they are doing. These early actions are laying the foundation for the project's ultimate success. For the couple, it is often hard to see any real progress early on. It is the project accomplishment and the co-created future that will generate enthusiasm and pull them forward.

Fulfilling partnership projects requires an investment in time, in energy and in teamwork. As the couple meets regularly and keeps re-creating their partnership projects, they will find themselves building the structure for the success of the project, involving others, and accelerating what gets completed. Every action and everything that gets accomplished along the way are the building blocks for the fulfillment of the project and for the future.

As the couple works in partnership, they will see the big picture and will attend to the details as well. There will be times when action and accomplishments will seem to lag. There will be times when the project will pick up velocity and a number of aspects of the project will begin to integrate. Each project will come to fruition as an expression of the partnership of the couple.

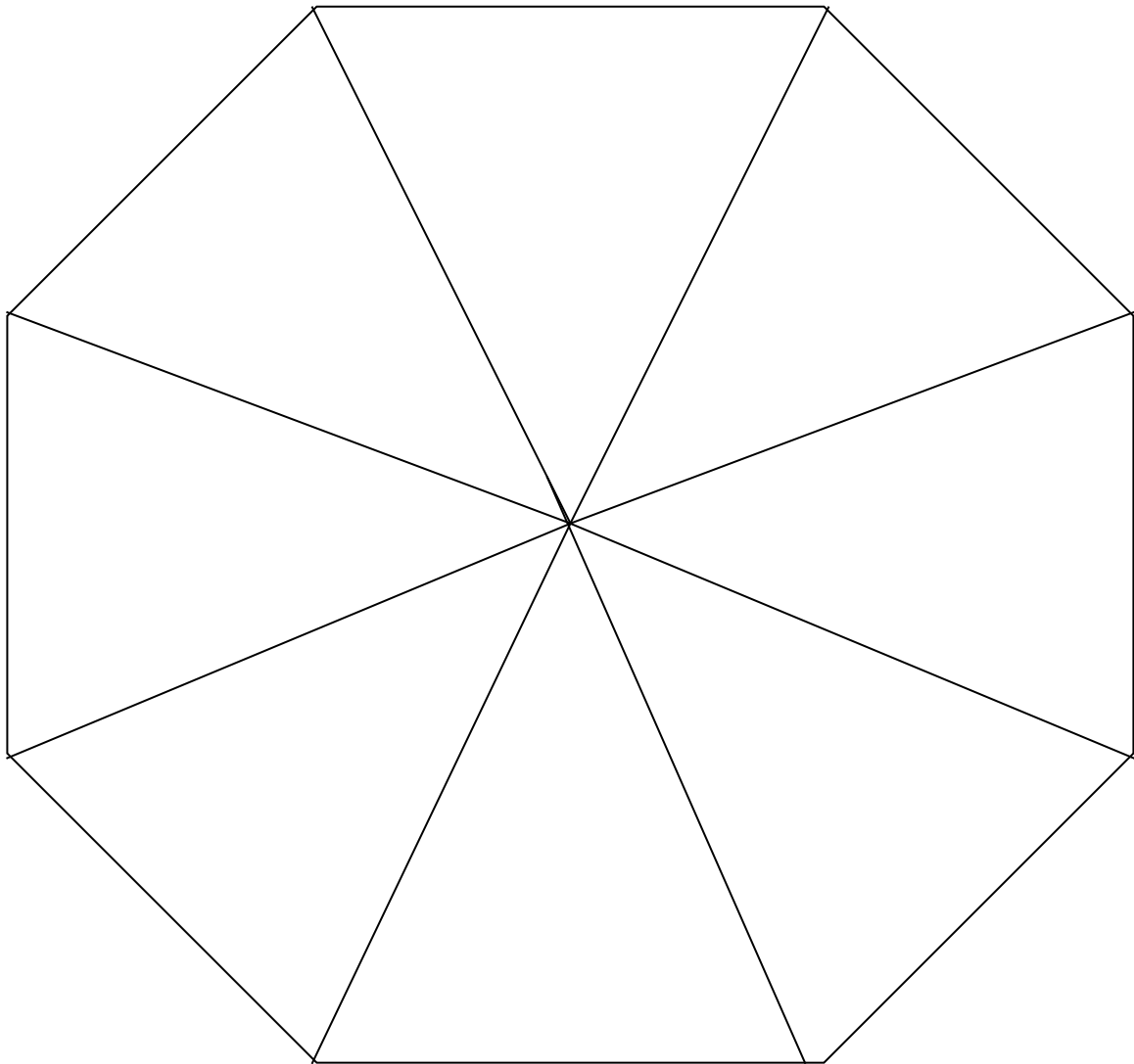
As projects are fulfilled, the couple's co-created future is fulfilled. Partnership projects become the playground for partners in action. They are an expression of the co-created contexts of commitment, alignment, listening, play and appreciation. Partnership projects express a couple's core values and the vision for their partnership being expressed in the world. Such projects fulfill possibility, partnership and passion for partners in living.

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**APPENDIX 1**

Partners in Living Umbrella



## APPENDIX 2

Partnership Project Format  
(Example: Joy to the World, a holiday party)

**Date Updated**  
(Example: November 15, 2005)

<b>Time</b>	<b>Action/Accomplishment</b>
Nov. 15	Create a list of friends and family to invite to our holiday party
Nov 30	Buy or create invitations to the holiday party
	Buy stamps
	Plan the evening
	• Create list of foods and beverages
	• Create the decorations
Dec. 5	Partnership Project meeting
Dec. 10	Buy the Christmas tree
Dec. 12	Send out the invitations
Dec. 13	Order the honey-roasted ham
	Decorate the Christmas tree
Dec. 12	Partnership Project meeting
Dec. 18	Go grocery shopping
	Pick up the honey-roasted ham
	Clean and decorate the house
Dec. 19	Have our joyous holiday party with friends and family!