

PART 1: Book Analysis Framework

1. Executive Summary

Thesis: Dual-career couples thrive when they move beyond logistical problem-solving to address underlying psychological and social forces—values, boundaries, fears, and identity—through intentional communication and shared decision-making.

Unique Contribution: The book reframes dual-career family management from individual time-management hacks to systemic couple contracting. Rather than pursuing the mythical 50/50 balance, couples succeed by explicitly negotiating which model (primary-secondary, turn-taking, or double-primary) aligns with their values and by revisiting this agreement through three major life transitions.

Target Outcome: Enable working couples to design sustainable careers and relationships by clarifying shared values, communicating boundaries and fears, dividing responsibilities strategically, and supporting each other through identity shifts and career reinvention.

2. Structural Overview

The book organizes dual-career family life into five domains:

Section	Function	Essentiality
Go Team!	Establish shared values, vision, and identity frameworks	Critical foundation; all decisions flow from this
Tick Tock	Create schedules, goals, and trade-off mechanisms	Operational necessity; translates values into daily practice
Away We Go!	Navigate geographic mobility and separation	Conditional; applies when relocation or commuting occurs
There Is an “I” in Team	Prioritize individual self-care and boundaries	Protective; prevents burnout and resentment
In Sickness and in Health	Manage stress, conflict, and mutual support	Relational glue; sustains partnership through challenges

The epilogue synthesizes reader experiences into practical wisdom, emphasizing flexibility and acceptance of imperfection.

3. Deep Insights Analysis

Paradigm Shifts

1. **From Balance to Seasons:** The 50/50 myth dissolves. Couples report success with 80/20 splits that oscillate—sometimes family gets 80%, sometimes work does. This reframes “balance” as dynamic rather than static.

2. **From Individual to Interdependent Careers:** Early dual-career couples operate in parallel; mature couples recognize their careers are intertwined. One partner's opportunity, setback, or reinvention affects the other's trajectory.
3. **From Breadwinner to Breadsharer:** Men's career identity is shaped not by their own ambition alone but by how they interpret their wives' work status. Breadsharers (who respect wives' careers) remain professionally flexible; breadwinners (who devalue wives' work) commit rigidly to organizational hierarchies.
4. **From Logistics to Psychology:** Couples who solve only the calendar problem (who picks up kids?) without addressing underlying fears (will we grow apart?) find solutions collapse under stress.

Implicit Assumptions

- **Assumption 1:** Both partners want to work and advance. The book does not address couples where one partner prefers not to work or where work is purely financial necessity.
- **Assumption 2:** Couples have agency to negotiate roles. Power imbalances, cultural constraints, or economic desperation are acknowledged but not deeply explored.
- **Assumption 3:** Communication solves most problems. The book assumes couples can articulate needs and listen; it does not address severe communication dysfunction or trauma.
- **Assumption 4:** Childcare and household help are available or affordable. The book acknowledges this disparity but centers solutions on couples with resources.

Second-Order Implications

1. **Identity Fragility:** When careers are primary sources of identity, career setbacks trigger existential crises. Supporting a partner through setback requires the supporting partner to reinforce their own identity separately—a paradox of interdependence.
2. **Asymmetric Vulnerability:** One partner often becomes the “secure base” (supporter) while the other explores reinvention. This creates developmental asymmetry. If the supporter never gets their turn, resentment calcifies.
3. **Generational Transmission:** Children of dual-career parents internalize both the possibility and the stress of combining work and family. The book hints but does not fully explore how children's own career and family choices are shaped by parental modeling.
4. **The Trailing Spouse Trap:** When one partner relocates for career, the other often bears hidden costs—loss of network, career pause, household burden. These costs are real even when both partners intellectually agree to the move.

Tensions

- **Tension 1: Ambition vs. Presence.** Both partners want to advance professionally and be present for family. These desires often conflict. The book offers no resolution, only negotiation frameworks.
- **Tension 2: Flexibility vs. Commitment.** Breadsharers remain professionally flexible to support partners' opportunities, but this flexibility can limit their own advancement. The trade-off is real.
- **Tension 3: Support vs. Autonomy.** Partners need both emotional support and independence. Too much support becomes enmeshment; too little becomes isolation. The balance is perpetually renegotiated.
- **Tension 4: Shared Vision vs. Individual Authenticity.** Couples must align on values, but individuals also need to "become authors of their own lives." These can diverge, especially during midlife reinvention.

4. Practical Implementation: 5 Most Impactful Concepts

Concept 1: Couple Contracting (Values, Boundaries, Fears)

Impact: Moves couples from implicit, fragile agreements to explicit, revisable contracts.

Application: - Each partner independently writes five core values and what they mean. - Each partner defines three types of boundaries: place (where to live), time (work hours), presence (living apart, travel). - Each partner names fears: growing apart, sacrificing career, financial insecurity, infidelity, inadequate parenting. - Partners share and negotiate common ground. Where divergent, find middle ground. - Revisit annually or when major life event occurs.

Why It Works: Prevents the "we never talked about this" crisis. Makes implicit cultural expectations explicit and negotiable.

Concept 2: Three Partnership Models (Primary-Secondary, Turn-Taking, Double-Primary)

Impact: Legitimizes diverse approaches; removes guilt from non-egalitarian arrangements.

Application: - Identify which model fits your current life stage and values. - Explicitly agree on the model; do not assume. - Revisit when circumstances change (new job, child born, career setback). - Double-primary is hardest but most rewarding; requires frequent conflict resolution.

Why It Works: Removes the pressure to achieve mythical 50/50. Couples report satisfaction across all three models when chosen intentionally.

Concept 3: Three Life Transitions (Working as Couple, Reinventing Self, Loss and Opportunity)

Impact: Normalizes crises; provides roadmap for navigating predictable ruptures.

Application: - Recognize when you are in a transition (major life event, career plateau, identity questioning). - In Transition 1, negotiate roles and family commitments; move from parallel to interdependent careers. - In Transition 2, one partner explores reinvention; the other becomes secure base; then roles may reverse. - In Transition 3, mourn old identities; explore new possibilities together; reinvent as a couple.

Why It Works: Transitions are predictable; knowing what to expect reduces panic. Each transition has specific traps (concentrating on logistics, mistrust, unfinished business) that can be avoided.

Concept 4: Look-Ahead Meetings (Weekly, Monthly, Annual)

Impact: Prevents surprises; aligns expectations; creates quality time.

Application: - Weekly: Sunday breakfast scan of the week ahead; who is doing what, where, when. - Monthly: Plan for upcoming travel, deadlines, busy periods; discuss support needs. - Annual: Reflect on past year; set goals for next year; discuss career ambitions and family vision. - Use structured questions to keep conversation focused.

Why It Works: Couples report that 15 minutes of planning prevents hours of conflict. Creates predictable touchpoints for connection.

Concept 5: Breadsharer Mindset (Mutual Career Flexibility)

Impact: Shifts from zero-sum (one partner's gain is other's loss) to cooperative (both partners' growth is possible).

Application: - Respect and elevate your partner's work, regardless of salary or status. - Remain professionally flexible to support partner's opportunities. - When one partner takes a risk (startup, career change), the other provides stability. - Rotate who takes risks; do not let one partner always be the supporter.

Why It Works: Couples with breadsharer mindset report higher satisfaction, less resentment, and more mutual support. Men with breadsharer identity are more likely to advance their own careers creatively (not just climb organizational ladder).

5. Critical Assessment

Strengths

1. **Psychological Depth:** The book goes beyond logistics to address identity, fear, and meaning. This is rare in work-life balance literature.
2. **Research-Grounded:** Each chapter cites empirical research (Petriglieri's 6-year study of 100+ couples, Gottman's marriage research, sleep science, etc.). Claims are not merely anecdotal.
3. **Inclusive Scope:** Addresses LGBTQIA+ couples, blended families, commuter marriages, expat assignments, and diverse professions. Not limited to heterosexual corpo-

rate couples.

4. **Actionable Frameworks:** Couple contracting, look-ahead meetings, and three partnership models are concrete enough to implement immediately.
5. **Honest About Trade-Offs:** Does not pretend couples can “have it all.” Acknowledges real costs (career pause, geographic separation, household burden) and asks couples to negotiate them consciously.
6. **Normalizes Imperfection:** The epilogue celebrates dropped balls, missed dinners, and messy reality. Reduces shame and perfectionism.

Limitations

1. **Class Blindness:** The book assumes couples have childcare options, can afford to live in multiple cities, and have flexibility in work arrangements. For working-class couples without these options, many recommendations are inaccessible.
2. **Heteronormative Framing:** While the book includes LGBTQIA+ couples, much of the analysis (especially on breadwinner/breadsharer identity) is rooted in heterosexual dynamics. Gender roles and status assumptions may not apply equally.
3. **Insufficient Attention to Power Imbalances:** The book assumes couples negotiate as equals. It does not deeply address what happens when one partner has significantly more income, education, or social power.
4. **Limited Exploration of Chronic Stress:** The book distinguishes sporadic stress (bad meeting) from chronic stress (wrong job) but does not fully explore couples where one or both partners are in chronically stressful roles with no exit.
5. **Underexplored: When Couples Diverge:** The book assumes couples can find common ground. It does not adequately address what happens when one partner wants to relocate and the other does not, or when one wants to leave work and the other wants to advance.
6. **Thin on Conflict Resolution:** While the book emphasizes communication, it offers limited guidance on resolving deep disagreements or managing contempt, criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling (Gottman’s “four horsemen”).
7. **Assumption of Stability:** The book assumes couples stay together. It does not address how to navigate dual-career family life during separation or divorce.

6. Assumptions Specific to This Analysis

- **Assumption A:** The book’s primary audience is college-educated, professional couples with some economic security and flexibility. Recommendations are calibrated for this group.
- **Assumption B:** “Thriving” is defined as both partners advancing professionally while maintaining relationship quality and parental presence. Other definitions of success (one partner prioritizing family, both prioritizing community service) are less central.

- **Assumption C:** The book assumes couples want to stay together and improve their relationship. It does not address couples in crisis or considering separation.
 - **Assumption D:** The book assumes work is a primary source of identity and meaning. For couples where work is purely transactional, some frameworks may not apply.
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PART 2: Book to Checklist Framework

Process 1: Couple Contracting (Values, Boundaries, Fears)

Purpose: Establish explicit, shared agreements on core values, geographic/temporal boundaries, and fears to prevent implicit assumptions from causing conflict.

Prerequisites: - Both partners willing to reflect and share vulnerably - Uninterrupted time (2–3 hours total, can be split across sessions) - Willingness to revisit and renegotiate

Steps:

1. **Schedule a dedicated time** when both partners are rested and not rushed; avoid high-stress periods.
2. **Each partner independently writes five core values** (e.g., achievement, family time, adventure, security, spirituality) and defines what each means to them with a story or image.
3. **Each partner independently defines three types of boundaries:**
 - Place: Where would you love to live? Where would you prefer to avoid?
 - Time: How many work hours is too much? How much travel is acceptable?
 - Presence: Would you live apart for a period? For how long?
4. **Each partner independently lists fears** about the relationship and careers (e.g., growing apart, sacrificing career, financial insecurity, infidelity, inadequate parenting).
5. **Share your lists with each other** without judgment; listen to understand, not to defend.
6. **Identify common ground** on values and boundaries; note where you diverge.
7. **Negotiate middle ground** where values/boundaries diverge (e.g., if one values adventure and the other security, agree on calculated risks).
8. **Acknowledge fears explicitly** and commit to addressing them proactively (e.g., if fear is growing apart, schedule regular date nights).
9. **Write down your couple contract** (1–2 pages); include agreed values, boundaries, and how you will monitor fears.
10. **Revisit annually or when major life event occurs** (new job, child born, career setback, relocation).

Process 2: Selecting and Renegotiating Partnership Model

Purpose: Explicitly choose which model (primary-secondary, turn-taking, double-primary) aligns with your values and life stage; revisit when circumstances change.

Prerequisites: - Couple contract completed (Process 1) - Understanding of three models - Willingness to revisit model periodically

Steps:

1. **Review the three models:**
 - Primary-secondary: One partner's career takes priority; other partner's career is secondary.
 - Turn-taking: Partners periodically swap primary and secondary positions.
 - Double-primary: Both partners continuously juggle two primary careers.
2. **Discuss which model fits your current life stage and values.** Consider:
 - Do both partners want to advance professionally?
 - Are there young children requiring intensive parenting?
 - Is one partner in a critical career phase (residency, startup launch)?
 - What does your couple contract say about career prioritization?
3. **Explicitly agree on the model** (do not assume); write it down.
4. **Discuss what the model means operationally:**
 - If primary-secondary: How much does the secondary partner sacrifice? For how long? What are the trade-offs?
 - If turn-taking: When will you swap? What triggers the swap?
 - If double-primary: How will you manage conflict when both have urgent demands?
5. **Acknowledge the costs** of your chosen model (e.g., primary-secondary may limit secondary partner's career; double-primary requires frequent conflict resolution).
6. **Identify how you will support each other** within the model (e.g., if primary-secondary, how will primary partner acknowledge secondary partner's sacrifices?).
7. **Set a date to revisit the model** (e.g., annually or when major life event occurs).
8. **When circumstances change, renegotiate explicitly.** Do not let the old model persist by default.

Process 3: Navigating a Life Transition (Transition 1, 2, or 3)

Purpose: Recognize which transition you are in; apply transition-specific strategies to avoid common traps.

Prerequisites: - Recognition that you are in a transition (major life event, career plateau, identity questioning) - Couple contract and partnership model established - Willingness to revisit roles and agreements

Steps:

For Transition 1 (Working as a Couple—New Job, Child, Blended Family):

1. **Recognize the transition:** Major life event (job offer, pregnancy, remarriage) requires renegotiating how you prioritize careers and divide family commitments.
2. **Avoid the first trap: Concentrating exclusively on logistics.** Do not just negotiate calendars and childcare; discuss emotions, values, and fears underlying the decisions.
3. **Avoid the second trap: Basing decisions primarily on money.** Consider other values (proximity to family, quality of life, career learning) alongside financial gain.
4. **Discuss how to prioritize your careers and divide family commitments.** Revisit your partnership model; does it still fit?
5. **Make choices openly and jointly,** not implicitly or for each other.
6. **Check in monthly** on how the new arrangement is working; adjust as needed.

For Transition 2 (Reinventing Themselves—Midlife Crisis, Career Plateau):

1. **Recognize the transition:** One or both partners feel restless, questioning their career path or life direction.
2. **Avoid the first trap: Mistrust and defensiveness.** The exploring partner may withdraw; the supporting partner may feel threatened. Explicitly reassure each other that exploration is not about the relationship.
3. **One partner becomes the “secure base”** for the other’s exploration (encouragement without interference).
4. **Avoid the second trap: Asymmetric support.** Do not let one partner always support the other. Rotate roles; both partners deserve time to explore.
5. **The exploring partner reflects on:** What led to this impasse? Why did I make the choices I made? Who am I? What do I desire? Whom do I want to become?
6. **The exploring partner explores alternatives** through networking, job shadowing, volunteering, secondments.

7. **Once the exploring partner has clarity, renegotiate roles together.** May need to revisit partnership model (e.g., shift from double-primary to turn-taking to allow one partner to take a risk).
8. **Check in monthly** on how the exploration is progressing; adjust support as needed.

For Transition 3 (Loss and Opportunity—Career Plateau, Empty Nest, Aging Parents):

1. **Recognize the transition:** Roles shift (children leave, careers plateau, parents age); identity questions resurface.
 2. **Avoid the first trap: Unfinished business.** Address regrets from earlier transitions (e.g., “I sacrificed my career for yours”). Acknowledge how you got here; commit to new roles.
 3. **Avoid the second trap: Narrow horizons.** Do not assume you cannot reinvent. Explore new possibilities (portfolio careers, volunteering, mentoring, hobbies).
 4. **Reinvent together**, not just individually. Take on a new activity or project side by side.
 5. **Mourn the old identities** (successful executive, full-time parent) while welcoming new ones (mentor, volunteer, artist).
 6. **Explore actively.** Ask “Why?” about assumptions. Flirt with multiple possibilities. Avoid taking things for granted.
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Process 4: Conducting Look-Ahead Meetings (Weekly, Monthly, Annual)

Purpose: Align expectations, prevent surprises, create quality time, and coordinate support.

Prerequisites: - Commitment to regular meetings - Shared calendar (digital or paper) - Willingness to discuss career goals and family needs

Steps:

Weekly Look-Ahead (15–30 minutes):

1. **Schedule a consistent time** (e.g., Sunday breakfast, Friday evening).
2. **Pull up calendars** for the week ahead.
3. **Each partner shares:** What is on my calendar? What are my priorities? When do I need support?

4. **Identify potential conflicts** (e.g., both have evening meetings; both have early mornings).
5. **Coordinate support:** Who will handle morning routine? Who will pick up kids? Who will cook dinner?
6. **Discuss any emotional or work stress** that might affect the week.

Monthly Look-Ahead (30–60 minutes):

1. **Schedule a dedicated time** (e.g., first Sunday of the month).
2. **Review the month ahead:** Travel, deadlines, busy work periods, school events, family commitments.
3. **Discuss career goals and projects:** What are you working on? What support do you need?
4. **Identify potential crunch periods** and plan how to manage them (e.g., if both have busy months, can one shift to lighter load?).
5. **Plan for self-care:** When will each partner have time for exercise, hobbies, friends?
6. **Discuss any relationship or family concerns** that need attention.

Annual Look-Ahead (2–3 hours):

1. **Schedule a dedicated time** (e.g., between Christmas and New Year, or summer vacation).
 2. **Reflect on the past year:** What went well? What was hard? How did we handle transitions?
 3. **Discuss career goals for the next year:** What do you want to accomplish? What support do you need?
 4. **Set family goals:** What do you want for your family? What traditions or rituals matter?
 5. **Revisit your couple contract:** Do your values, boundaries, and fears still hold? What has changed?
 6. **Revisit your partnership model:** Is it still working? Do you need to shift?
 7. **Block off key dates:** Vacations, school performances, conferences, anniversaries.
 8. **Discuss long-term vision:** Where do you want to be in 5 years? 10 years?
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Process 5: Supporting Partner Through Career Setback

Purpose: Provide emotional and practical support during difficult career transitions (layoff, missed promotion, reassignment, relocation).

Prerequisites: - Breadsharer mindset (mutual career flexibility) - Willingness to listen without judgment - Ability to manage your own stress

Steps:

1. **Take a deep breath** when you hear the news; manage your fight-or-flight response so you can think clearly.
 2. **Check your mindset:** Replace catastrophic thoughts (“This is a disaster”) with helpful ones (“We’ve survived 100% of our setbacks together”).
 3. **Listen without interrupting.** Give your partner undivided attention; let them vent for 3–5 minutes.
 4. **Validate their feelings:** “I know this is hard. Thank you for telling me.”
 5. **Do not compare your stress** to theirs or offer unsolicited advice; they need to be heard first.
 6. **Ask probing questions** to help them reflect: “What makes you think that’s the case?” “Is there a situation where a different response would work?”
 7. **Offer support:** “What can I take off your plate?” “How can I help?”
 8. **Adopt breadsharer language:** “We’re a team. Your career matters. Let’s figure this out together.”
 9. **Encourage outside support:** Suggest therapy, career coaching, or trusted friends; you cannot be their sole support.
 10. **Take care of your own career and well-being.** Continue to deliver excellent work; do not let their stress derail you.
 11. **Check in regularly** (weekly or monthly) on how they are processing the setback.
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Process 6: Communicating Self-Care Needs to Partner

Purpose: Establish “third space” (time outside work and home for personal interests) without guilt or resentment.

Prerequisites: - Clarity on what self-care means to you - Willingness to have vulnerable conversation - Commitment to reciprocal support

Steps:

1. **Define what you need:** What activities recharge you? (Exercise, hobbies, time with friends, spiritual practice, alone time?)

2. **Assess feasibility:** Given your current schedule and finances, what is realistic?
 3. **Choose a calm time to talk** (not during morning rush, bedtime, or after work stress).
 4. **Use “I feel” statements:** “I am feeling burned out. I would love to have time for [activity]. What do you think?”
 5. **Avoid blame:** Do not say “You never let me have time for myself” or “You always get what you want.”
 6. **Listen actively** to your partner’s response; be curious about their needs too.
 7. **Propose a specific arrangement:** “I would like to [activity] on [day/time] for [duration]. You would handle [responsibility].”
 8. **Discuss trade-offs:** What will your partner need in exchange? (Their own third space, help with household tasks, etc.)
 9. **Agree on a trial period** (e.g., 4 weeks) and then check in on how it is working.
 10. **Do regular relationship checkups** (weekly or monthly) to discuss how self-care arrangements are working and adjust as needed.
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Process 7: Deciding Whether to Relocate for a Job

Purpose: Make a holistic decision about relocation that considers career, family, relationship, and identity.

Prerequisites: - Job offer or opportunity in hand - Willingness to think beyond financial metrics - Honest conversation with partner and children (age-appropriate)

Steps:

1. **Think holistically, not just financially.** Ask: “Who do I want to become? What kind of family will we be?”
2. **Consider lifestyle factors:** Are you suited for the new location? (City vs. small town, climate, culture, proximity to family?)
3. **Talk extensively with your partner** about impact on their career. Will they be able to find meaningful work? If not, how big a setback?
4. **Talk with children age-appropriately** (not too much to create anxiety, but enough to prepare them).
5. **Consider your long-term career path:** What is the next move after this? Will this role pigeonhole you?
6. **Identify an “escape hatch.”** If the move does not work out, what is your exit plan? (Other job opportunities, ability to return to previous field?)

7. **Request a temporary stint or job swap** if possible; try before you buy.
 8. **Seek advice from trusted peers** who have made similar moves; avoid advice from boss (biased) or close family (vested interest).
 9. **Avoid analysis paralysis.** Recognize that some ambivalence is normal; you do not need perfect certainty.
 10. **Make a decision jointly** with your partner; do not let one person decide unilaterally.
 11. **If you relocate, revisit the decision after 6–12 months.** Is it working? Do you need to adjust?
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Process 8: Prioritizing Sleep as a Working Parent

Purpose: Establish consistent sleep habits that improve relationship quality, parental presence, and work performance.

Prerequisites: - Recognition that sleep deprivation is affecting your relationships - Willingness to prioritize sleep over other activities - Ability to set boundaries with work and family

Steps:

1. **Calculate how much sleep you need** (typically 7–9 hours for adults) and work backward from wake time to set bedtime.
 2. **Set a bedtime alarm** on your phone to remind you to start winding down.
 3. **Create a consistent sleep routine** (dim lights, relaxing music, reading, meditation) and stick to it on weekdays and weekends.
 4. **Avoid blue light** (screens) 30–60 minutes before bed.
 5. **Do not use weekends to “catch up” on sleep;** sleeping in throws off your body clock.
 6. **Avoid serious conversations right before bed.** Save difficult topics for when you are both rested.
 7. **Make the most of different sleep schedules** with your partner. (Early riser handles morning routine; night owl handles bedtime.)
 8. **Explore flextime at work** if possible (working from home in morning, adjusting hours) to protect sleep.
 9. **Do not stress about occasional poor sleep nights.** Your body is resilient; one bad night will not derail you.
 10. **Check in monthly** on sleep quality; adjust routine if needed.
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Process 9: Managing Conflict When Reuniting After Work

Purpose: Prevent the first 15 minutes after work from becoming a conflict zone; create a peaceful reunion ritual.

Prerequisites: - Recognition that you and partner have different needs at end of day - Willingness to discuss reunion expectations - Commitment to emotion regulation

Steps:

1. **Recognize your differences:** You likely have different mental/emotional states, recovery times, and needs when you get home.
2. **Identify your personal needs** at end of day: Do you need quiet? Social connection? Physical activity? Food? Decompression time?
3. **Discuss with your partner** (not at end of day, but during a calm moment) what you each need when you first get home.
4. **Agree on a reunion ritual** that honors both partners' needs. Examples:
 - 15 minutes of quiet time, then connection
 - A hug and brief check-in, then separate to decompress
 - A walk together to transition from work to home
5. **Practice emotion regulation:** Before you greet your partner, take a few deep breaths; notice your emotional state.
6. **Use interpersonal skills** you use at work (listening, empathy, patience) with your partner.
7. **If conflict starts, pause and reschedule.** Say: "I can see we are both tired. Can we talk about this after dinner when we have more energy?"
8. **Avoid discussing serious matters** right after work when both are depleted.
9. **Check in weekly** on how the reunion ritual is working; adjust as needed.

Suggested Next Step

Immediate Action: Schedule a 90-minute "couple contracting" session with your partner within the next two weeks. Each of you independently write down five core values, three types of boundaries (place, time, presence), and three fears about your relationship and careers. Then share and discuss, aiming to identify common ground and negotiate middle ground where you diverge. Write down your couple contract (1–2 pages) and commit to revisiting it annually or when major life events occur.