A journey is like marriage. The certain way to be wrong is to think you control it.

John Steinbeck

On the house I lived in from 2002-2006 we had a balcony that extended along the East side of the second floor. It connected our master bedroom with the fourth bedroom that served as an office for my wife and me, providing an alternative path to the office if I didn’t want to pass in front of the kids’ bedrooms. No great view of the mountains, but pleasantly shaded in the summertime by the house and a large tree on that side of the house.

Since my wife was often on the phone for her job, when I had to take a phone call I’d often slip through the French doors if my phone rang an take a call outside. That’s in the summer; in the winter I’d duck out the inside door and head downstairs to the kitchen. The balcony railing was made of thick 4 inch wooden beams, sturdily anchored to the walls. With an acre of front yard and very little traffic, this was a great place to talk business with a minimum of interruptions and a fair amount of privacy. My nearest neighbor was over 1000 feet away and we had to yell loudly at each other just to get one another’s attention.

Sitting on that railing, relaxing outside was a familiar position for me. I had hours of conversations with Andy about our business together, his job at the time, and even life in general.

There was one day that sticks in my mind from that time period that felt like a milestone in the business. I’m not even sure what the issue was, but we had either decided to do something, or against smoething,and both Brian and Adny were on opposite sides fo the decision. I had become the tiebreaker, but ni the end, they were each upset with the other one. It was a fundamental disagreement about how to view the business, and I remember Andy asking me about someone leaving the company. It would either be Brian or Andy, but this week, this decision that had separated them, seemed to be about to cause a rift where they didn’t want to work together. I wasn’t willing to vote on any buyouts since we had grown the business to a point where it was valuable, but not making enough money to pay anyone their share without causing issues.

“We’re a family”

That was my response to him. Not sure why that popped into my head, but there it was. I thought they both needed to calm down, and take some time to think about their feelings, but that we were essentially a family at this point. Having one of them leave would be equivalent to getting a divorce, which is never easy or pretty. And not always possible unless someone is willing to take a huge loss in their life.

Being a partner in a business is much different than being a shareholder. You are tightly bound to each other in your company, and might not even be able to separate yourself since there isn’t a way to force your partner to buy you out. You can always sell your shares to someone else, but that’s only fi you can find someone willing to invest in the business. We didn’t have partnership agreements , which is a bad business idea, but even if then it can be hard to convince someone to buy your shares if your partners don’t welcome them with open arms.

As we chatted, I think that this was one of those “duh!” moments where both Andy and I realized how much this company had changed our lives. No longer were we just friends, not just working together, we were more like brothers with Brian and each other.

And we were tightly bound, whether we liked it or not.

Over the next few weeks we emailed back and forth, working through whatever issues we had. We moved on from that point, but in many ways I think that time served to galvanize us together and drive SQLServerCentral forward.