

► **Resilient Relationships: How to Custom Design Them to Better Fit Who You Are by Maureen K. McCarthy**  
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As human beings, we have an innate need to live and thrive within community. It is built into our DNA and is an integral part of how we navigate our environment. Whether a community of friends, a group of people living in the same dwelling, or an entire intentional community, we are wired to connect. According to Dr. Daniel Goleman in his book *Social Intelligence*, “neuroscience has discovered that our brain’s very design makes it sociable, inexorably drawn into an intimate brain-to-brain link-up whenever we engage with another person. During these neural link-ups, our brains engage in an emotional tango, a dance of feelings. To a surprising extent, then, our relationships mold not just our experience but our biology.”

Who do you count as your community? Which relationship tangos feel effortless and which feel like a series of stepping on each other’s toes? If we are wired to connect, than building stronger, more resilient relationships is crucial, whether between 2 or 2000+ people.

When it comes to creating relationships, we tend to define them by the standards we learned or observed growing up; *this is what marriage should look like, how roommates should behave, or how a large community should govern themselves, etc.* But we’ve found, as life now changes and evolves at a much faster rate, that those past relationship definitions don’t necessarily fit the people involved, or the business at hand. We’re looking for alternative paths that may or may not even exist yet.

Experiencing the pain and discomfort of the old models often causes us to label ourselves and the relationship as a failure. But it’s not failing, it’s a sign that we need to custom design our relationship foundations to better reflect who we are and what we want to create.

After three life-altering, personal experiences in one year, I began to see the need to redefine who I was in relationship, as well as how my relationships could be built not only to serve everyone involved, but to encourage all of us to quickly bounce back from stressful experiences and continually thrive as connected, loving people. Out of that learning my husband and business partner, Zelle Nelson, created a new way to build, sustain and transition personal and business relationships with trust and respect in order to have more effortless day-to-day interactions and build resilience into life. It’s called the Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document. It is now being used in 100+ countries around the world to build healthier business and personal relationships, often replacing or enhancing traditional legal contracts. Blueprint of WE Collaboration Documents are building stronger foundations within communities, corporations, schools, non-profits, families, couples, friends, partners, tenants, siblings, and even with yourself.

When we first created the concept we were drawn to the graceful image of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dancing. Don’t they make it look effortless? Like you could just get up and do it yourself? That’s what we wanted our relationship to be: a foundation of strength built at the start, which would enable our day-to-day interactions to be more effortless, more graceful. We didn’t want to fix what was broken down the line, we wanted to build a more solid relationship from the beginning that would make stressful times a little blip on the screen rather than an enormous hurdle to overcome.

A Blueprint of WE is made up of 5 Components of which each person writes and shares with the others involved in the relationship, whether its two people or an entire community. The Document is, in essence, the building and exchanging of the “Blueprint of ME” in order to create a more effortless, less stressful and ultimately far more enjoyable daily relationship. It also acts as a third party mediator to bring people back to peace if the need arises.



## The 5 Components of a Personal or Business Blueprint of WE are:

1. The Story of Us
2. Interaction Styles and Warning Signs
3. Expectations
4. Questions to Return to Peace
5. Short Term and Long Term Agreements



### 1. The Story Of Us

This is the story of the individuals as they see one another while things are going smoothly. It's written from their own viewpoint in order to capture the affirmative perspective, and remind us why we are drawn to this situation or person in the first place. In the event that things go astray, and we lose sight of what we once found so amazing, the Story of Us can link us back to what we love. Capturing these thoughts in writing enables us to be very present and have a heightened awareness of who we are together. It also allows us the ability to look back, as we move forward, to see if the story is changing, and if our relationship needs to change to accommodate where we are.



### 2. Interaction Styles And Warning Signs

In this section each person creates a list of his or her Interaction Styles and Warning Signs. The Interaction Styles are an account of how you generally like to work and live. Do you need to think out loud with a group, work alone at times, need an agenda? Do you tend to prefer quiet time, are you high energy, direct when you communicate, do you lean towards the optimistic? Interaction Styles deal with how each person likes things done, what's non-negotiable, what their preferences are, etc.

The Warning Signs is a list of the external clues you may show as signs of stress. The behaviors you exhibit right before things spin out of control. Are you less patient, do you immerse yourself deeper in your work, become a perfectionist, tap your pen on the table? And most importantly, when you show these signs, *how might someone help you pull out of the spiral?* Tell them *now*, because in the moment, it might feel impossible to say what you really need. Come talk to me; give me space, then talk to me; help me see the data so I can step back from the emotional; offer me a back rub; encourage me to go for a walk, reassure me, etc. Warning Signs are the behaviors each person tends to display when things begin to go awry. Knowing these up front, and having someone tell you how to best assist, can alleviate a great deal of miscommunication and assumption that lead to a downward spiral. When we share who we are and how we operate, we have a much greater chance of gracefully dancing together.



### 3. Expectations

The Expectations section is a place to list the type of things contracts traditionally cover in terms of what's to be done, agreed upon, or intentioned. This is also the space to let the other person know what overall expectations you have about the particular type of relationship you've entered into. Some people even place a traditional legal contract into the Expectations section, or attach a Blueprint of WE as an addendum to a legal contract. Which means their Document would be seen by a judge if it ever came to that.



#### 4. Questions To Return To Peace

If during a stressful moment you could call in the perfect third party mediator, who might that be? Mother Theresa, Buddha, Martin Luther King, your grandmother? When you're in a peaceful place, it's much easier to call in the wisdom of not only people such as these, but your own higher wisdom as well. The Questions section of the Document is meant to hold this higher wisdom for when you desperately need to access it, but it appears to have vanished. Each person writes a list of Questions they commit to answer with one another to help them return to a state of peace if the need arises. Questions like:

- What am I afraid of?
- What do we need to say that we haven't been saying?
- What do I need from you right now?
- Does money play a part in this situation?
- What do I gain by continuing/ending this relationship?
- Is it time to redefine or redirect our work together?



#### 5. Short And Long-term Agreements

Part of creating a Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document is also agreeing to a limited amount of time that can elapse before agreeing to come together to go over the Document, typically between 3 hours and 3 days. The timeframe you choose depends on your temperament, style of relating to one another, and to what degree you need alone time before you can calm down enough to have a more loving conversation. Once you acknowledge the need for the conversation, each person re-reads the Document in order to re-orient themselves with the other person. Then they go over the Questions together.

The parties also agree on a Long-term timeframe of five years or more to find peace if the unimaginable happens and they can't seem to use their Document before then. They also agree that if they can't manage to come together, they commit to no outright harm of the other person. They will not speak negatively to others, or purposely create more pain for the other person.

Creating a Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document is a profound way to engage our best selves in our relationships. When we build the foundations of our communities to custom fit who we are, exchange the "Blueprint of ME," and establish a practice of mindfulness, we maintain an effortless, exhilarating tango that feeds our soul and connects our common visions.

*Maureen K. McCarthy is Director of the Center for Collaborative Awareness and is the co-creator of the Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document with her business partner and husband, Zelle Nelson. As Maureen worked within corporations and communities large and small, she realized that rather than fixing what was broken, she was drawn to pioneering new foundations that would build healthier individuals and groups from the start. The Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document is one of those foundational tools, which is now being used in 100+ countries around the world in both business and personal settings. Visit [www.blueprintofwe.com](http://www.blueprintofwe.com) to download the concept paper and sample Documents to create your own Blueprint of WE Collaboration Documents. Maureen and Zelle teach and speak on the Blueprint of WE in many parts of the world, as well as offering a Facilitator Certification Program and online classes. You can reach Maureen at [maureen@blueprintofwe.com](mailto:maureen@blueprintofwe.com). She lives in Asheville, NC, USA.*