

► **Ever Have a Relationship Go Sour?** by Maureen K. McCarthy
Spirit in the Smokies Magazine, September 2002

Years ago I went into business with my best friend. We worked together at the same company for years and already knew that as a team, one plus one made three. We were so full of enthusiasm and passion for the business idea, as well as the partnership, that we gave it everything we had. Then nine months later, she wanted me to leave.

I was devastated. It was a mere twenty-minute conversation about what bits she would take over and when my laptop could be returned. If you saw us for the first time that day, you would never have envisioned the storehouse of memories we'd captured. I knew as well as she did that things weren't working out, so I wasn't actually sorry to leave. Those things rarely come as a surprise.

But it was a blow. It took us three years before we spoke again, and in the meantime, I questioned my instincts and lost faith in others and myself. I thought the relationship ended that day, but I carried it around with me everywhere. And boy was it heavy. I went on to start a consulting business, Engaging the Soul @ Work, and have found my passion again for bringing a better balance of people and profits to the business world.

New Foundations

When my former husband Bill and I decided to divorce, we poured over literature on the subject and found it to be thoroughly antagonistic, which was the opposite of how we felt about one another. We wondered why our culture didn't support a more positive divorce scenario. We decided our ultimate goal was to stay in a state of grace as we ended some aspects of our relationship and evolved others.

Both of these difficult experiences made me realize that I wanted a new way to build, sustain, and transition my relationships with honor and grace. So when my current husband, Zelle, and I began a serious relationship, we decided that being in a state of grace was our ultimate goal, rather than keeping the relationship status quo at all costs. We created what I call our **Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document**; a 3+ page document designed and written by us, which is very personal and explicit.

It consists of **5 Components**: **1. The Story of Us** as we see one another while things are going smoothly. **2. A list of our Interaction Styles and Warning Signs** that we might show if we're sliding out of sync, and how the other one can best respond. **3. Our Expectations** regarding the particular type of relationship we're entering into. **4. A series of Questions** we wrote that we commit to going over and answering to help return us to a state of peace, even if that means somehow altering the relationship as it stands. **5. Short and Long-term Timeframe Agreements** that pertain to how long we'll go before we address even the smallest stress, and the promise to no outright harm if the unimaginable happens.

It has helped us immeasurably as a couple and allowed each of us to keep our self esteem intact while giving us an opening to learn more about one another. I went on to create Blueprint of WE Collaboration Documents with my friends, family, landlord, colleagues and clients. In fact, I no longer use legal contracts in my business, only Blueprint of WE Collaboration Documents, even with large global corporations. And they have all agreed!

Shifting Priorities

One example of a business relationship that benefitted from the goal of remaining or returning to a peaceful place, was with my client British Petroleum (BP) in the UK. They were very open to

creating new organizational foundations, including using the Blueprint of WE. After several months of exploring how they do business on many levels, placing a state of grace became a top priority, which positively affected the company and personally impacted many individuals as well.

At the time, BP was involved in a highly expensive lawsuit for several years with a man fighting a zoning change that forced him to sell his land to accommodate a safety procedure. BP lawyers advised against any contact with the plaintiff, even though he had repeatedly requested it. Seeing business from a different perspective, however, a few men from the leadership team made the decision to meet the man for lunch, not to convince him of anything, but to really listen.

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to attend at the last minute, and the gentlemen went on their own. During lunch they genuinely apologized for the agony this man was caused and acknowledged how difficult it must have been to sell his land. Over the course of lunch, they learned that the man was merely looking for was a personal response from a very large, impersonal corporation. A few hours after returning from the lunch, the entire lawsuit was dropped.

As a society, there have been few tools to help us through transitions and most seem to be legal documents such as contracts, partnership agreements and employee manuals. These start with the premise; "I'm afraid you might harm me, so I need to protect myself." The Blueprint of WE begins with the premise that we both want to remain in, or return to, the peaceful state where the relationship first began. The act of capturing our stories on paper itself makes a huge difference toward mutual respect and grace.

Global States of Grace

In May, I spoke on the Blueprint of WE at an International Peace Conference in Russia, where 50+ countries were represented by peace leaders from around the world. It was remarkable to see the concept easily transcend all cultural and language boundaries. People are now creating them within their business and personal relationships in many parts of the world.

I've found these documents have served a greater purpose than any legal document could ever muster, and have been crucial in situations where legal doesn't tread (but where my self esteem could be battered). I won't say that a business or personal relationship of mine will never go sour again, but I know I'll never walk away from another one with a monkey on my back. In fact, what I've actually found is that I'm living my whole life in a state of grace now. It's less stressful, more productive and a heck of a lot more fun!

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 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. She lives in Asheville, NC, USA.