



Partnership on Darkest Dungeon

The Double-Edged Sword

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PREFACE

- Not a prescriptive talk
- Subjective account of the structure of Red Hook & resulting challenges
- Focus on our partnership, not whole team dynamics, contributions





BACKGROUND

- 5 years: Scratch to 3 million copies
- Co-presidents, only directors on the board
- Equal ownership, equal salaries & bonuses
- Different skillsets, overlapping interests
- Two bosses: Sometimes messy & complicated

Darkest Dungeon would not have been as successful another way.





WHY PARTNER?

- Accomplish more together than apart
- Shared career goals, resources
- Moral support
- Different, but compatible perspectives





WHY PARTNER?

- All these benefits have a price
- Competing egos, desire for authorship
- Potential for argument, conflict



Partnership is a double-edged sword





A SOLID FOUNDATION

- Knew each other for some time – Work, Poker, Movies etc
- Timing is everything...it took years





A SOLID FOUNDATION

- Discussed money, ownership, & control up-front
- Clear about no-go lines & expectations
- 50/50 was the only way





1: DIVIDE & CONQUER...

- Leverage compatible interests, skills, goals
- Carve out areas of expertise
- Accomplish more, cover more bases
- Back to back, fighting off the hordes!





1: ...BUT WHO'S THE BOSS?

- Some areas require a "Lead"
- Balancing personal vs. company goals
- Can cause staff confusion
- "right now" vs. "the future"





2: MAKE BETTER DECISIONS...

- Two set of eyes; two different approaches
- Applies to EVERYTHING
- Very different brains:
 - The Chris Approach
 - The Tyler Approach
- Devil's Advocacy—necessary & “fun”





2: ...BUT ARE WE STILL ALIGNED?

- Life goals & priorities vary, especially over time
- 3-5 Years brings change: birth, death, moving
- Situations & motivations change





3: HELP SHOULDER THE BURDEN...

- We share an unwavering commitment to the product
 - “Whatever it takes, whatever I need to do”
 - Good to know somebody has your back.





3: ...BUT IT CAN BE THANKLESS.

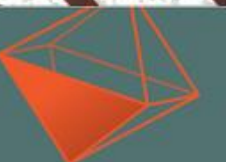
- Backed into corners just because the work needs done
- Feeling that you are doing all the trash work or carrying the load
- “Grass is always greener”
- Danger of growing resentment – *“He has it easy.”*





4: A SHARED PASSION...

- Sharing a passion & creative spirit can help keep momentum
- Seeing results you didn't author can motivate!





4: ...MEANS SHARED SPOTLIGHT.

- Share a strong sense of authorship on the game
- Unequal limelight-->friction
- *We share or alternate interviews*
- *We frequently mention the other person*
- *Equality is not practical in all time-slices*





GOLDEN RULE #1: DON'T LET IT FESTER

- Zero tolerance policy for lingering dissatisfaction
- We verbalize big issues immediately, even if only partly formed
- “Rocking the boat” is not just OK, it’s necessary
- The value of “disclaimers”





GOLDEN RULE #2: VETO POWER

- We each have veto power of critical decisions.
- *If either of us doesn't want to do it, we **can't** do it.*
- Forces difficult discussions & debate.
- We don't have to agree on everything.
- Establishes a threshold for letting go or dying on the hill.





GOLDEN RULE #3: NOTHING IS STATIC

- Needs & desires fluctuate with business, life & time
- A partnership must evolve
- “solveable” vs. “manageable”





CONCLUSION

- **A Partnership is Really a Marriage**
- Each feels he/she is doing 65% of the work
- Praising, recognizing each other & reconnecting is vital
- We cannot fully appreciate what we have accomplished without appreciating one another.
- A partnership can be messy & complicated, but we have made it work with honesty, transparency, support, & respectful debate.





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