

SISTERS WORKING TOGETHER

It is a well known fact that the relationship you have with a sibling is usually the longest relationship you will ever have in your life. As a result, they tend to know you better than anyone else which can be good or bad depending on the quality of the relationship. So what happens to the relationship when sisters decide to work together?

Well many things can happen within a sister's relationship. On any one day, and sometimes within quite a short space of time your sister can be your best friend and worst enemy. The closeness you have with her can be both a strength and weakness. Because of the long standing relationship you have with her, there are usually intense feelings of love and hate, coupled with undying support and loyalty towards each other. Sometimes in spite of, and typically because of this - sisters choose to work together very successfully.

One such pair are twin sisters Angie Wintle and Sharlee Earley. Angie manages a trust looking after two girls with severe disabilities. Sharlee is one of 13 staff employed by the trust.

The overwhelming feeling emanating from these two was their sense of closeness, reliability and absolute trust in each other. Although competitiveness exists, (they are identical twins after all), there was present an absolute loyalty towards each other.

Generally speaking, sisters have an unbreakable support system, and an almost unspoken dialogue that communicates itself through their interactions. Some sisters talk in shorthand. Most of the time they are in agreement without discussion, at other times there is a strong need to come to a consensus.

There are many differences that exist in the **working sister** relationship; depending on their place in the family. For instance take an older sister who is naturally more protective of the younger one. The younger sister may feel bossed around and at times resentful of that. Naturally for twins like Angie and Sharlee, there will be a more robust level of competition. Experiencing sibling rivalry is quite normal, but at the end of the day, most sisters are there for each other.

When looking at the advantages and disadvantages of working together, these two were very aligned in their thinking. As an example, Angie feels that working together is good, because she can always count on Sharlee as consistent back up. She also sees her as very reliable and more inclined to help her out. Her flexibility is a key advantage to the trust. Meanwhile, whenever possible, Sharlee wants to be there to support Angie.

Sharlee reports that although it has many advantages, one of the down sides of their working relationship can be that this is the only time they get to spend together. Subsequently, most of their time spent with each other, is in working hours. This can feel at times as though something is missing from their relationship. The quality time they would spend together, is diluted and can make the relationship more stressed than it would normally be. Angie agrees and puts it down to the busy lives they both lead.

Generally speaking they agree there are many more advantages than disadvantages, but that having strategies in place initially - helps the success of their working relationship.

5 Key Implementation Strategies:

1. Set boundaries initially, know whose role belongs to whom
2. Be open minded – respect your sister's opinion
3. Be honest – this builds more trust and respect
4. Self monitor – check whether you are speaking as a sister/colleague
5. If necessary, seek mentoring support for both of you – a professional with no agenda is best

Overall, the fact that you and your sister are working together, suggests a mutual trust and respect exists. Add that to your deep knowledge of each other – including the strength and weaknesses, and the potential is there for a successful working enterprise.

Advantages to working with a sister;

- You can have an altercation, without it becoming a serious employment issue
- She knows how you think
- You are more inclined to help each other out
- She is there for you when it counts
- You each have the other's best interests at heart
- You put yourself out more than you would for a non-related colleague

Disadvantages to working with a sister;

- The unconscious and conscious sibling rivalry that exists
- Spending time working together instead of having fun together
- Having to report to a sister in management; conversely
- Having to give your sister directives
- Being compared in the workplace
- Having arguments that aren't always resolved easily

With the best will in the world, there will be times when your working together is more negative than positive. You may even experience it affecting your personal relationships and turning family gatherings sour. If this is the case you could try the following-

1. Try to talk things out together in a non-threatening way. If this doesn't work:
2. Use mediation, you will need to choose someone you are both comfortable with
3. Use I language, e.g., I feel annoyed when my ideas are ignored, instead of *you make me annoyed because you don't listen*
4. Make behaviour consistent with words used – if you have a certain stance on an issue; make sure your body language/subsequent actions are in alignment.

The bottom line - working together can be fantastic! If the relationship is a good one, you will find you are both supportive, helpful and there for each other.

If the relationship is a bad one to start with then there will be ongoing and unhelpful issues that undermine every interaction you have. If this is the case you may need to cut your losses and move on. For most sisters the relationship dynamic that exists, lies between support being fundamental to the relationship and arguing some of the time. This is a normal part of 'being sisters'.

Whatever you choose, remember family comes first! You can easily replace that computer that keeps breaking down - a sister, however, is irreplaceable!