

GCES Founders' Journey: Balancing Love and Business in the World of Finance

By: Amir Bakian June 26, 2023

Most of us have heard the old saying, "It's not personal. It's business." And it goes to show that in the business world, there is not much space for emotions that get in the way. But what happens when personal life and business intersect? You decide to start a company with your significant other, for example.

In the dynamic landscape of entrepreneurship, working with a spouse is not an uncommon scenario that promises not just shared professional success but also a deepened personal bond. However, this unique fusion can be as challenging as it is rewarding.

As the lines between home and work blur, striking the right balance between marital bliss and business success can be a tightrope walk that creates a unique set of challenges, spanning from communication and role clarity to risk sharing and business scaling.

The co-founders of the Pennsylvania-based financial advisory and retirement planning firm GCES, Galen Bargerstock and Clinton Smith, are familiar with these intricate circumstances all too well. As a couple who has been together for nearly twenty years, the pair has had their fair share of hurdles in both their professional and private spheres of life.

"We have been together since 2005, and we have gone through many things together. It was quite difficult sometimes, and I'm sure that at some point, we both wondered if it was going to work out," Galen shares. "Still, like all other couples who are in the same situation as us, we had to learn to work together and also stay romantic in order to succeed in all aspects of life."

As their work schedules involve them either being together 24/7 or not at all for days or weeks as one travels around different states on business, Galen and Clinton have had to prioritize communication above everything else to avoid conflict as much as possible. Despite that, fights are inevitable, and when they did happen, the two had to find the best and speediest solutions so that their internal issues did not affect the GCES team and their business as a whole.

"Everyone fights at some point. Maybe it sounds cheesy, but it's important to keep the focus on the issue. Galen

and I fight a lot, but we've managed to solve every problem quickly by understanding that it's us versus the problem rather than fighting one another," Clinton says.

A part of their success lies in the fact that the two of them have distinct roles in GCES. Since Clinton handles marketing, PR and branding, and Galen serves as a financial expert, their professional paths do not easily converge, which allows them to work independently while staying on the same course of scaling their business and expanding to wider audiences.

"If you want to succeed as a team, you need to share the bigger picture. You need to be able to think as a team and value each other's insights while also taking independent steps that will enable your business to grow," Clinton explains, adding that as long as partners stay on the same path, the journey toward success will be that much easier.

Currently, Galen's and Clinton's firm is looking to expand beyond their native Pennsylvania. While they were focused on federal employees only in the past, they currently offer comprehensive financial aid and retirement planning strategies to individuals and families across the region and the United States.

"We used to offer in-person meetings only, but after the pandemic started, we needed to adapt to the new reality. The pandemic was an incredibly difficult time, but it also offered us a silver lining in the sense that it gave us an opportunity to expand beyond our state via virtual meetings," Galen says. "We cover 37 states right now, and I'm frequently on the road in order to make in-person services more widely available now that the COVID situation has calmed down."

While the challenges of working with a partner can feel daunting at times, Galen and Clinton agree that through hard work and understanding, perfect harmony in both professional and personal lives can easily be achieved. "Working together as a couple means that your life partner is also your work partner. This requires a perfect blend of love, professionalism, trust, and respect. It's like a dance where both lead and follow, creating a rhythm that propels you forward."



Galen Bargerstock,
President of GCES
Financial Advisor



Clinton Smith,
CEO of GCES