

Relationships

Partners keep business friendly

Communication and trust are the basis for success

By ERIN HILL PERRY
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Jessica Clanton and Chantae Ross complement each other. That means a lot in a friendship. They've found that it has meant a lot more as business partners.

"I'm like the super-nice one — and she's like the 'OK-wait-a-minute-now' one," Ross says.

Best friends since graduating together from Cass Tech High School and Michigan State University, the 27-year-olds have shared many milestones — from birthdays and marriage to the birth of Ross' first son.

These days, those milestones are of the kids enrolled in their day care, Little Angel's Watching Care, which they run from Ross' Detroit home.

Since opening the day care in 2008, Ross and Clanton say that being in business together has bolstered their bond. Their approach: total honesty.

"As friends, you would think you would kind of skim the surface," when you have an issue, Ross says. "But I really think it's helped us to communicate. ... We don't want to let this business ruin us. Outside of business, we're still friends."

They say they've maintained a solid friendship because they have a clear understanding of their business, their roles and their goals. They also know conflict is part of the job.

"One of our struggles is



WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

Friends since sixth grade, Jessica Clanton, left, and Chantae Ross, co-owners of Little Angel's Watching Care, graduated together from Cass Tech and Michigan State University, where they were roommates for 3 years.

money," Clanton says. "We're very good at saving, but sometimes Chantae likes to splurge on things for the kids."

Clanton, on the other hand, says she is a stickler for making sure the day care's financial reserves stay healthy. That's why she deals with the parents — like the one who didn't pay tuition for almost a month.

"We ended up getting burned in the end," says Ross, adding that she had given the parent too much leeway.

Clanton and Ross say they've learned to appreciate

each other's differences.

"You have to be able to trust the person," Ross says. "She trusts me to make the decisions when I'm here, and when she's here, I trust her to make the decisions. We've never had any issues when we had to choose friendship over partnership."

KEEP OPEN LINE OF COMMUNICATION

Ross Sanders, executive director of Bizdom U in Detroit, a four-month boot camp that provides support for entrepre-

neurs, says he is hesitant about friends becoming business partners because of the impact it can have on both the personal and professional relationship.

"Friends can maintain their bond as business partners by working to maintain open lines of communication, respect and trust in each other," Sanders says. He also added that it's important to take time for the friendship outside of work.

Sanders says Clanton and Ross are doing the right thing by keeping talking things out — even when it's a tough issue.

"These discussions are critical to have up front so that partners can thoughtfully determine if they should move forward together or not," Sanders said.

Clanton and Ross have found creative ways to share the workload.

For the past three months, Clanton, who has a bachelor's degree in biological science, has been fulfilling the student teaching requirement for her master's degree in special education. That has left Ross — who has a bachelor's degree in family community services with an emphasis in early childhood education — with the kids most of the time.

In January, the two will switch roles when Ross will go off and fulfill her student teaching requirement for the same program.

"We're just there for each other," Clanton says. "And we are some big goofballs. That really lightens the mood, working together and being friends. We enjoy each other."

Clanton says anyone with a dream to be an entrepreneur should dig deep for the confidence to push past every naysayer.

"We had so many people against us," Clanton says. "The people you think love you the most just doubted you and told you not to do it. But just believe."

That attitude has paid off. The duo recently purchased a building for the day care's second location, which they hope to open next fall.

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HI, CAROLYN: So, X and Y marry mid-life. X has one child who lives with his ex-wife who is well-to-do. X's child spends every other week-



CAROLYN HAX end and holidays

with him. Y has three children whom she supported with no help from their father. X makes three times what Y does.

All was well, until the first Christmas.

Y thinks the couple should spend roughly equal amounts on each of the four children. X thinks that the total that Y spends on her three children is what he should spend on his child. He applies the same formula to birthdays. X says he would feel as if he were shorting his child if he followed Y's plan. This strikes Y as unfair, especially on Christmas morning when, under X's plan, Kid X would get the DVD player and Kid Y would get the DVD.

— Bah-humbug

DEAR BAH-HUMBUG: I think X is being obtuse, and Y is doing little to sharpen his comprehension.

To be fair, the DVD example is about as sharp as an illustration gets of the unfairness of X's logic.

For X to think the unequal-gift idea is even viable, either (1) Y hasn't articulated her emotional case — and should, now; or (2) X hasn't heard it (repeat Step 1); or (3) X doesn't care.

If it's Door No. 3, then X isn't obtuse, but instead has a raincheck pad on the shelf where his heart should be. For everyone's sake, but particularly the children of both X and Y, I'm pulling for Door No. 1.

Make your case, Y, clearly this time, and find out now whether you chose an X who thinks just like your ex.

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Today's topic

Would you create a gift registry for your child? Here's what local moms had to say:

"N-O! I vote 11 on the tacky scale of 1-10."
— aaronmom1

"I've made a wish list on Amazon for my kids but it's mostly for my own personal use. I've emailed to their grandma when she's asked and I've sent links to products to their aunt when she's needed ideas but they are suggestions not really a registry."
— themirolands

"I cannot see doing this for my own kids. If someone calls for ideas, I give them the few that I many have. Other than that, we hope the receipt is included with the gift in case it needs to be returned cuz I don't even like asking for it!"
— last2know

"I field calls, emails, chat messages, FB notes constantly about sizes, what the kids like/have ... blah blah blah ... So on some level it could probably be quite helpful. I also forgot who I told what."
— HappyGirl72

"I look at the wish lists the same as a child circling pictures in a catalogue. But essentially a wish list is probably the same as a registry, huh?"
— tylersmommy

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