



Akshay, right, and Shalini Dosaj are the owners of several restaurants through their holding company Purple Honey.  
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## For better, for worse: Partners in every sense

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May 22, 2016 Updated: May 23, 2016 06:03 PM



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Two different couples, one business decision in common. Akshay and Shalini Dosaj and Ahmed Al Akber and wife Olivia Manner have all decided to take their vows "for better, for worse" beyond marriage and into their [entrepreneurial](#) ventures, with both husband-wife teams setting up in the food industry. What could possibly go wrong?

British corporate lawyer Akshay Dosaj, 34, met wife Shalini, also 34, an Indian raised in Al Ain, in a Dubai restaurant in 2007. He subsequently moved to the UAE and they have been married for seven years; their son is now four and their daughter one.

Ms Dosaj works as group performance director at Al Fara'a Group, her family construction business, but had set up several restaurants in her little spare time – Coriander, Zaytinya and Biryani Pot; her husband decided to leave the corporate world two years ago to join her in the holding company, Purple Honey. Their latest venture is the Indian restaurant Tamba in Abu Dhabi's World Trade Center.

"There is no one in the world you can trust more than your partner," says Mr Dosaj. "Most businesses have just one managing director; we have two, which halves the challenges.

"Some people might disagree but, from my perspective, working together adds a new dimension to the relationship. Most couples purely see the non-work life of their partner; when you work together, you see the whole person. Our core beliefs for the business are aligned, which helps."

When Mr Akshay joined the company, his wife was expecting their second baby.

"I trust him wholeheartedly and having him there full-time gives me peace of mind and means the few hours I have for Purple Honey are used wisely," says Ms Dosaj. "At work we are very, very professional – we challenge each other respectfully."

In Dubai, the couple behind the catering company Hello Chef, which delivers fresh ingredients and recipes to help busy families cook and eat healthily, have a similar tale.

Mr Al Akber is a 35-year-old Bahraini with an Irish mother. He met wife Ms Manner, also 35 and Finnish-French, at Arabic classes in Bahrain. The couple have been married six years and moved to Dubai in 2014 with their two children, a daughter, four, and son, two.

Ms Manner set up Hello Chef in Dubai the next year. Then earlier this year, her husband, who has his own marketing consultancy, "switched gears" to help her scale the business.

"She's my boss at home and at work," he jokes. "Home is more important than our careers; we have kids and a house. If you're not happy at home, you're not happy at work."

Referring to the team development stages of forming, storming, norming and performing, Mr Al Akber says, "We had some heated debates in the storming phase; now we've passed into norming and are smoother as a team. We're much closer now; we can talk about work problems and understand 100 per cent – I'm not talking about a boss at work she's never met."

However, the couple admit they have not prevented their work bleeding into their private time.

"We are far from having a great work/life balance but I think, in a start-up, it's just like that," says Ms Manner. "But I am so happy to work with him; I learn from him every day."

Business psychologist and *The National's* Workplace Doctor Alex Davda says creating boundaries where there are "blurry lines" between the relationship and the business is key for couples who work together. "A great day can really rejuvenate the relationship and a bad one can do the opposite," he says. "Your work naturally will come home and it takes quite a mature couple, and real team work, to manage that."

But, he adds, if you can truly operate as a team, it can make the relationship stronger. "It can be fantastic, as you have someone you trust completely working for something alongside you."

Mindful of their different working styles, Mr Al Akber and his wife have gone so far as to take personality profile tests to understand each other better. "Olivia is more expressive and I'm more analytical/ driving," he says.

"We try to find ways to switch off – we need to have a passionate relationship with respect and understanding, beyond work. I do like to spend time with her where we go out and let our hair down."

When it comes to their children, Mr Dosaj says he and his wife approach parenting as an extension of business. "If Shalini is in a meeting, I'll get home early and vice versa. Business pervades all aspects of life," he adds. "The key is not to have a distinction between life and work but a homogenous approach."

"If you are blessed enough to love what you do, everything just fits in. For those that read this, please do this if it's an aspiration. It's a wonderful thing to do as a couple."