

High risk, high reward

We find out why couples would work with each other through the stress that is running a restaurant

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As the adage goes, one should never do business with friends. With couples, there's no need for an adage; most corporate policies will tell you that's a bad idea. "It's not an ideal situation. I wouldn't recommend it," says Hemant Mehta of Ray's Cafe & Pizzeria in Bandra about his running the restaurant with his wife, Rashmi. The restaurant business is particularly stressful as it has a high failure rate - especially in a fickle city such as Mumbai. Add to that unforgiving customers and the fact that failures are glaringly public, it all makes the trade more stressful than many others.

There are, however, reasons that several couples do open restaurants together, as seen recently with Pali Village Cafe in Bandra and Ray's; older examples are Rahul and Malini Akerkar from Indigo and Deepa and Suhas Awchat from Diva Maharashtra. One of the most important factors is trust; "Other partners might react badly to success (or failure). Here you share the success," Rashmi points out. Rahul Kanuga, one of three owners of Valhalla that includes his wife, Tricia Batliwalla, points out that although that trust level is still there with family members, working with a spouse is better. "If I worked with my father we



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Mishali and Suren at Pali Village Cafe

would constantly be at each other's throats; with family, we share personality traits whereas Tricia and I complement each other better".

Other reasons are more specific to being in a relationship. "Our ability to compromise as a couple extends to the workplace," points out Mishali Sanghani, who opened Pali Village Cafe with her fiancée Suren Joshi. Sanghani acknowledges that it would be hard to work with someone else purely because "I can be very difficult and stubborn at times - I can't be like that with anyone else." Rashmi and He-

mant agree that it is easier to be open and honest with a spouse; "Plus, I can scream at her," smiles Hemant. Tricia says that couples already know how to calm each other in volatile situations - this can be extended to the work place.

Working together naturally brings about a new dimension to the relationship. Couples learn things they normally wouldn't about each other. "Rahul is sweet, gentle and sensitive - I expected that to spill over to work - but at times, he can be very decisive and businesslike. At home, he is more open to negotiation,"



Rashmi and Hemant Mehta at Ray's Cafe & Pizzeria

Batliwalla smirks. Joshi says that, "Mishali always used to yap about her creativity. Now I've seen that side of her. Plus, her tantrums," he nervously smiles.

Being around each other constantly naturally affects any relationship. Asked whether it has brought them closer (or more distant), Rashmi says they've been married too long for that to matter. Kanuga acknowledges that while he and Batliwalla spend a lot of time together, they spend a lot less quality time together. "We make it a point to go on holiday every quarter". Disagreements are natural ("Some-

times he has stupid ideas," says Sanghani) and those need to be dealt with professionally - not as a couple would. Kanuga points out that his relationship would probably have suffered if they hadn't been together long; "You have to understand and be comfortable with the person." One of the hardest things - but also the most important rule any couple should keep in mind - is to not take work home or bring home to work. As Batliwalla says, "It takes a lot of discipline. Even if Rahul doesn't get back to me about something, I cannot bring it up at home."