



Collaboration as Dating

John Keefe – jkeefe@wnyc.org

On your first date, you wouldn't plan your wedding. Or sign a prenup. Or name your baby.

So why do so many collaborations start that way?

Companies and organizations clearly need to learn how to date. See if you click. Get to know each other. Play. In order not to skip this important part of a partnership, take lessons from the thousands of personal collaborations that begin over dinner every Friday night:

- **Start with dinner.** Get together. Talk. Dream. Learn. Over food, of course. Find a spot that's casual, informal and conducive to conversation.
- **Don't be self-centered.** You'll kill a relationship quickly if you spend all evening talking about yourself, *your* needs, *your* wants. Instead, find out about your potential partner. Learn about their hopes and dreams. Think about how they may enhance or build on yours.
- **Don't name the baby.** Put off the discussion of branding, naming the project, how credit is bestowed. This gets emotional fast, and quickly moves you out of the realm of low-risk prototyping.
- **Put off the prenup.** In fact, I'd avoid writing *anything* down at first -- especially anything regarding goals, directions, duties, etc. This starts to define the relationship from the outset instead of allowing for open innovation and experimentation.
- **Respect each other.** Be nice. Be giving. Be open. And if that costs a little, consider it an investment in the potential of the partnership. Pick up the check here and there.
- **Meet up again. And again.** Make a plan -- and put it in your calendar -- for the key people to meet regularly, preferably over a meal, to check in on how everyone's doing. That's the time to make sure nobody feels disrespected, over-committed, or unhappy. Then adjust accordingly.
- **Break up gracefully.** If the partnership just doesn't click, part ways, remain friends, and be sure your team gets together to learn from, and record, what parts worked.

Happy dating!