

## Building on Life's Passions, Together

**Colleen Wilson  
and Ken Achs**

*Lawyer, designer;  
Owner of Mid-West Group  
Married since 1995*



Of the working couples showcased, a common thread exists between each of them

*Text and interviews by Paul Miazga,  
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Photos by Amy Thorp (except as noted)*

**flow:** How did you first begin working together?

**CW:** Ken and I had just begun dating and we had plans to go to the movies. He said "Meet me at the office" as he had gotten bogged down in a situation over buying a building. Ken had lawyers on it, but they couldn't resolve it fast enough to suit him. I said, "Come on, we're going to be late for the movie. I'll take a look at it tomorrow." I resolved it quickly and it sealed my fate...

**flow:** Do you know of other couples who work together? Who do you look up to in this regard?

**CW:** [Laughing] There are no role models for this (kind of relationship). However I learned from my parents that if you have your own business, it's not a 9-to-5 job.

"My mother was very much a stay-at-home, traditional wife and mom who was the hub of the household, and my father a successful entrepreneur working long hours. I think to be happily married to Ken, you had to come from that background and understand the sacrifices that go along with it."

When I met Ken, I was a lawyer and I had a TV show and I was happy with my career, but when he could see that I could make a contribution to the business, which was his passion, he wanted me to work with him. It wasn't just about me anymore. It was about what was good for us because that's how we see marriage, as a partnership in every way. You support each other and so the personal partnership by happenstance grew into a business partnership. The fact was that I also knew if I ever wanted to see Ken I would have to work with him, and even though giving up my enjoyable career in law and television was not easy for me, when we got married Ken became my priority and that meant my career focus had to be the business.

**KA:** I joke that I only work half-days: twelve hours. No, I'm not aware of any role models; we just kind of worked it out. We had skills that complemented one another, and while we each had strong opinions about business matters, somewhere in the middle we came together, and the result was very good. Like-mindedness and conscientiousness work for us. People that have those traits stay with us because we're all on the same page.

**CW:** I enjoy what Ken does. When we go on vacation, we don't go to lie around on a beach all day. We go places where we look around at properties and sites that look interesting to develop. For us, there's no real secret to work/

life balance. As our CFO Trevor Jacek says, we have "fully integrated" our work/personal life relationship. So while we don't really have any role models, we have some critically important people that work with us and "get" us, and who understands how Ken and I interact.

**flow:** What's changed since your relationship started?

**CW:** At the beginning, we didn't talk about work as much—there were a few discussions about personal things, but now it always seems to end up in some discussion about business. One of the problems in working with your spouse in these all-consuming businesses is that you don't know when to draw the line and stop talking about business. We even worked on our engagement trip to New York. It wasn't planned that way, but when a bundle of time-sensitive legal documents got FedEx-ed to us, I had to review them. Lots of fiancées would've been annoyed, but it's just part of life with Ken. It was probably about then that I drank the Kool-Aid and became as consumed as Ken for wanting to do business deals. However, I would love to have a little more balance, and while Ken has been saying for years says he's going to try, it never changes. He loves his work and I'm proud of him for what he does. His enthusiasm is infectious. We keep each other re-inspired, pick each other up, and feed off of each other.