

10 Keys to Job Share Success

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Abstract

Job sharing has traditionally been viewed as a way for companies to retain talented women, and for women to continue advancing their careers while achieving the seemingly elusive work/life balance. Today it is also being leveraged to reduce overhead in a down economy (alternative to lay-offs), or satisfy the needs of workers with significant commitments in addition to their careers, particularly Gen Y, those continuing their education, or people approaching retirement. Like great marriages, great job shares don't just happen – they are the result of significant thought, planning, and commitment. 10 Keys to Job Share Success is written for executive-level job share teams, although the advice would be useful to any level. Drawing on 3 years of job sharing experience plus the insights of many other accomplished job share teams, this article offers a range of advice from philosophical to tactical to help job shares succeed.

10 Keys to Job Share Success

Introduction

Corporations and employees have been benefiting from job sharing for over four decades. Those who successfully job share love it, as do the companies they work for. Job share teams are highly engaged, highly productive, and highly loyal to the company. Although many people have job shared, most job share teams start from scratch in figuring out how to make their partnerships successful, and “learn by doing” as the job share progresses.

If you are interested in job sharing or currently job sharing, this is for you. With suggestions ranging from philosophical to tactical, 10 Keys to Job Share Success is intended to help new job shares ramp up more quickly, and existing job shares be even more successful. The target is executive-level, or teams in leadership positions.

These tips are based on our 3 years of job sharing at BEA Systems, first as VP of Marketing Strategy and Operations then as VP of Services Marketing, as well as many helpful interviews with experienced, senior job share teams. Although every job share arrangement is unique, these tips reflect best practices from several highly successful teams.

With a better understanding of job sharing as well as more job share successes, we hope that more companies will encourage and support job sharing, and more employees and communities will benefit from it.

Philosophical/Strategic

1. From “I” to “We”

The single biggest shift you’ll experience in going from a full time employee to a job share is that your goal becomes the success of the job share *team*, not you as an individual. As a team, you need to think and act as one to be treated as one. The mindset of the two partners must always be “we”, and not “I”. As a team, you must have “one voice”. This applies to how you work, communicate, and present yourselves.

In any professional situation, recognition for work done is very important. In job shares, the recognition must always go to the team.

This will happen: You are working on an important project. By virtue of your schedule of on and off days, one of you does the lion’s share of work on the project, but the final presentation lands on the other’s day. Leave your ego at the door. Always take credit as a team, never as an individual. Make sure you both use “we” when referring to the project and its results. Take enormous satisfaction that the team performed well.

Sign e-mails from both of you. In discussions or e-mails, use “we”, not “I”.

Marge: “Who created this plan?”
Elaine: “We did.”

Donna: “Who sent the email about budget?”
Laurie: “We did.”

Remember that most people have never worked with job shares. They will follow your lead. If you act as one, they will treat you as one.

2. The Partnership is Golden

The first key is “externally” orientated – how to present and position the job share to others. Now we will look at “internal” orientation – investing in the relationship between the job share partners. This is another big shift from being a full time employee. Plan to invest time in developing the professional relationship with your partner – more time that you spend developing professional relationships with your manager, peers, or team.

The relationship between the partners is golden. Like any relationship, this doesn’t just happen, it requires effort. Take time to get to know each other extremely well - understand each other’s personal and career goals, and motivations.

Job share partners don’t need to have similar personalities, but need to have similar values and strong mutual respect. For example, our personalities are very different: Laurie is very outgoing and creative, whereas Elaine is very achievement oriented and analytical. But we have a very similar work ethic, both doing whatever it takes to deliver outstanding results and passing the baton with things in great shape.

Bret: “You two are so different – How do you work so well together?”

Elaine: “Different personalities, but complimentary backgrounds and very similar values. We love being a team.”

Practical things we recommend for making and keeping your job share partnership strong:

- Be totally authentic with each other. Always being open, honest, and genuine will foster a clear and complete understanding of each other.
- Schedule regular check-ins devoted to the health of the partnership. Once a quarter, do “retreats” with an agenda that allows you to discuss how things are going, changes you feel would improve the partnership, and actions moving forward.
- Better understand each other’s personalities and motivations. Many tools are available, but we used the Enneagram (www.enneagraminstitute.com), a personality profile system, and a LJ Map (www.ljmap.com), a value assessment tool.
- Nip problems in the bud. Agree to not be defensive if an issue is raised, and raise issues as quickly as possible. This will keep things moving quickly and smoothly.
- Openly identify areas of growth for each partner, and support each other in those areas.
- Have total respect for each other. Recognize and appreciate your similarities and differences. Make sure you both feel proud to be partners. Let others know that you’re proud of each other.

These recommendations enable a much greater awareness of each other’s motivations and natural working style, and significantly help in maintaining a smooth working relationship. Like many job share partners, you may quickly grow to prefer working as a team rather than individually, and consider yourselves “career partners”.

3. Be Bold, Be Visible

You’re in the job share because you’re serious about succeeding in a challenging position and advancing your career. It is a privilege to job share, and you have earned the privilege. Your company is supporting your job share because your talent is valuable and your productivity is excellent.

The job share will be viewed as win-win if you, as partners, are bold and visible about both your success in achieving corporate goals, and your success as a job share. As in any position,

highlight your contributions and achievements. At the same time be bold in highlighting the job share and its success. Being a job share is a differentiator.

It's actually easier to highlight your success as a job share than as an individual contributor. You can brag about each other!

Laurie: "Sales results are in, and our marketing promotion boosted revenues by 20%."

Elaine: "Laurie's analytic skills were instrumental in assessing the data and targeting the promotion."

Laurie: "Elaine's business experience led us to this recommendation."

Elaine: "Our combined effort gave a better result that either of us could have done on our own."

Unfortunately, job shares sometimes "hide" because they feel they're receiving special treatment, and visibility may jeopardize the privilege. What if someone objects? What if management fears that everyone will want to do it? If you ever find yourself having this dysfunctional thought, *stop!* In fact, the reverse is true. Successful job shares highlight management creativity and the company image. All the "best places to work" evaluations we found included job sharing as part of their evaluation criteria, for example Fortune Magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For" and Working Mother magazine's "100 Best Companies for Working Mothers". Proactively help the company image benefit from your job share!

Execution

4. Make Decisions with One Mind

For your job share to be effective, you must make good decisions smoothly and swiftly. It is critical that you take time to think through and clarify your joint decision-making process:

- What decisions need to be made together? (strategic, hiring/firing, budget expense over \$10K, commitment requiring a major investment of time/people...)
- What decisions should be made by whoever's "on"? (everything else)
- What process is used to make the decisions? Create a decision-making guide.

For example, we decided that the following decisions would be made together:

- Strategy planning and direction
- Hiring and firing
- Personnel reviews, raises and bonuses
- Budget setting
- Expenditures over \$10K
- Any commitment requiring a major investment of time/people

To ensure good decisions made both together and independently, we asked ourselves the following questions:

- How does it support the corporate strategy?
- How does it contribute to achievement of our goals and objectives?
- Stakeholders:
 - o Who are the key stakeholders effected?
 - o What is their input/position? Is there critical support?
 - o What is the engagement plan with stakeholders?
- Resources:
 - o What resource (talent, time, money...) is required?
 - o Is the resource available, or will it divert resources from another effort?

- If so, will it make a greater contribution?
- What are the short, medium and long term
- What is “success”?
 - Metrics & milestones
 - Results expected

Having a decision guide will help you make and communicate good decisions efficiently.

Warning: Always support each other’s decisions publicly. If there is to be a discussion between you about the decision, have it in private! (Does this sound like parenting?)

Smooth decision making and communication will help you “kick the ball down the field” for each other.

Emily: “Being in a job share prepared me to be a CEO. It made us think through and clearly define our decision-making process, which allowed us to make better decisions faster. I think everyone should be required to be in a job share before they can be a CEO.”

5. Be Equal, Be Treated Equally

You want everyone you work with to view you as equal. They shouldn’t care who they’re working with. You shouldn’t care which one of you they’re working with. Establish equality from the very beginning.

Suggestions:

- Each partner works the same number of days
- Split travel equally
- One review with one rating for the team. (The only exception is in the development aspect of the review. It makes sense that you will have different areas for development.)
- Equal level. Equal compensation. Equal benefits.

The hardest person to convince may be your boss. Explain that you cannot afford to deal with who gets credit for work performed, or you will be forced into a competitive (vs. collaborative) relationship. Then your manager won’t have to worry about what’s happening on the back end – she/he can merely evaluate the quality of your overall performance.

David: “Who crafted the strategy document?”

Elaine: “We did. And we worked with the team.”

Mari: “Who sent the e-mail requesting a meeting?”

Laurie: “We did. Please schedule it whenever our calendar is available.”

Above all else, avoid the “trap” of competitiveness, which undermines the job share partnership.

Tactical

Communication, or lack thereof, tends to be the first voiced reservation about job sharing. Without exception, excellent communication is critical to job sharing success. There are two aspects of communication that should be considered: communication between the two job share partners, and communication between job share partners and others. We’ll start with communication between the partners.

6. Fail-Safe Communication with Each Other

You'll need a fail-safe communication method for both real-time communications and for updating each other as the baton is passed between on-and-off days. For others to treat you as one, there needs to be complete confidence that anything discussed with one has been accurately conveyed to the other.

Determine the best way to contact each other "real time" when needed. This is typically done via PDA or mobile phone. Commit that you will each carry a mobile phone and have it on for any immediate needs. You'll be surprised how infrequently you need it, but on the few occasions needed, you'll be very glad it's there!

Laurie: "In the vendor negotiations, a lot of numbers were tossed around. Just to confirm, what was the latest proposal we put on the table?"

Elaine: "\$20,000."

Laurie: "Thanks. Bye!"

In the second aspect of internal communication, passing the baton, you need to communicate what's happened while the other person has been off. This includes what was accomplished and what you expect will happen next. It's important not to be bashful or overly polite – be very direct about what was done and what your partner needs to do. The communication not only provides a seamless transfer of information, but engenders a sense of accomplishment and is highly motivating for the team.

For scheduled communications, not surprisingly, different job share partners have developed different methods that work best for them. Expect to iterate through several methods to find the one that is most efficient for you. Here are some examples:

- Notes document
 - o During the course of the day, continually update a notes document to pass to your partner. Jointly agree on a template that includes categories such as Immediate Attention, Personnel, Goals, and Longer Term. Indicate **action required** in red, so it is crystal clear what the partner needs to do first.
 - o When the baton is passed on changing days, the other partner reads the notes first, followed by a phone call to answer questions and discuss any issues. Set a regular time for notes delivery and the follow-up phone call.

We committed to have the finished notes document to each other by 7pm and talk by phone at 9pm on our baton-passing days, Tuesday and Sunday. From 9-10 we would talk through the notes as well as flagged e-mails, answer questions, and collaborate as needed. We also agreed that the 9-10 hour was best for talking on additional days if needed. This worked well for our families. By setting our time after 9pm, our young children were tucked in. Having a target end time helped us stay on task, be efficient, and get enough sleep.

- E-mail Flags
 - o Create a system to flag e-mails for each other to read, so you're both not reading all e-mails.

Given the typically large volume of e-mail messages, we agreed that the person "on" would read all e-mails that day, and flag only the ones the partner needed to read. This freed us from having to separately summarize e-mail communications. The partner would need to read only a fraction of e-mails. In our case, a purple flag indicated that Elaine had read the e-mail and Laurie needed to also read it, a blue flag indicated Laurie had read it and Elaine needed to, and a red flag indicated Elaine and Laurie should talk and take action. It also helped to cc: ourselves on key e-mails we sent and then flag them if we wanted the other to see the communication.

- Voice-mail messages
 - o At the end of the day, leave an “executive summary” of the day on each other’s voice mail. Follow-up phone call for questions and discussion.
- Shared files
 - o Typically each job share partner will have a laptop. You will need a file system that you both can access. Be careful not to create different versions of documents stored on your laptops – it’s clean and easy to manage documents with a shared file system.

We created a shared file system on the network, in which all documents were stored, and to which only Elaine and Laurie had access. If we made any significant changes to the structure or content of the shared file system, we mentioned it in our notes. This worked beautifully – we were never without the latest draft of a document or current information.

A final note on communications: Don’t forget to share the “soft” aspects of the job, such as casual meetings and hallway conversations which help to build context and deepen your relationship with coworkers.

7. Seamless Communication with Others

The most visible part of your job share is how you communicate with others. The objective is for everyone to feel that communicating with one partner is the same as communicating with both partners.

The communications should always represent the job share team, not an individual position of point of view. The goal is that no one worry about who’s “on” and who’s “off”, or who is handling any particular task. Make it easy and effortless for people to work with you. Here are a few specific suggestions.

Communicate How To Communicate

Explain the extent of your communication to others so they understand that they can pick up a conversation with one person right where they left off with the other.

When we first started job sharing, our people would repeat things to each of us that we had already communicated to each other, which was frustrating. It wasn’t until we conducted a New Manager Assimilation that we discovered they were equally frustrated, feeling they needed to tell us both the same thing. We all found this amusing, and promptly fixed the problem by letting them know there was no need to repeat information to us both – one was sufficient. They quickly learned this was true.

E-mail, Calendar, IM and Phone Messages

Use joint e-mail, calendar, IM, and phone message systems. When someone e-mails you, they do not need to worry about to whom to send it, or who is reading it. They should always assume that both receive the e-mail and know its contents. When someone schedules a meeting with you, they do not need to worry about who to schedule with or who will be at the meeting. The same holds true with IM and phone messages.

Always sign e-mails from both partners. Let people know that the communication is coming from the job share team, not an individual.

We had a code for sent e-mails. If Elaine sent the e-mail, she signed it from “Elaine & Laurie”. If Laurie sent the e-mail, she signed it from “Laurie & Elaine”. This helped us stay organized. Although we didn’t advertise our code, we were happy to share it if

someone needed to know, or confirm it if someone figured it out. In general, our co-workers were not at all concerned with whether the e-mail came from Elaine or Laurie.

Co-worker Relationships

Be conscious of building and nurturing co-worker relationships. Co-workers know that there is a tremendous amount of communication and collaboration between the job share partners, and it's important they feel appropriately included. Hold each other accountable for regular check-ins and collaboration with key co-workers. In doing so, you extend the benefit of the collaborative partnership to others, and ensure that the camaraderie of the job share doesn't leave your peers feeling neglected.

Handling Disagreements

Never disagree in front of others. If a discussion needs to happen, it should happen in private between the two of you. If a correction or criticism of each other needs to happen (and it will), do it in private. Always be supportive of each other and unified when communicating with others.

8. 100%+ Coverage

Leverage your unique working arrangement to the benefit of yourselves and the company. One of the big advantages of a job share over part time positions is "more than 100% coverage". Whenever possible, cover for each other so there is not a gap: skew vacations, trade days when needed, and step in to cover if your partner is sick.

One week, due to an unavoidable personal commitment, Laurie and Elaine switched days. At one point, Elaine was IMing with a co-worker, Yu-Ting, and they decided they needed to talk. When they spoke by phone, Yu-Ting was surprised to hear Elaine's voice – she thought she was IMing with Laurie since she happened to know it was usually Laurie's day!

The other side of the coin is to be diligent about disengaging on your days off! If you're doing e-mail on your partner's day, you confuse both your partner and your co-workers. One of the big advantages of the job share to *you* is that you don't need to worry that things are being perfectly covered while you're off. Fully disengage and enjoy your time!

9. Manage as One

When managing a staff, it is important to be unified in your approach and actions. Thorough internal and consistent external communications will play a key role. Handling logistics will help. Suggestions:

- Both job share partners should attend staff meetings and team off-sites. Be coordinated in setting and handling the agenda. Be balanced in "air time", taking turns presenting, answering questions, and participating.
- Make sure you are both playing "good guy" or "bad guy". Try to avoid good cop/bad cop situations. Uphold each other's criticism or praise.
- If a team member is skeptical about the job share, confront the issue directly and work it out. Use it as an opportunity to improve your brand.
- Collaborate on personnel issues and the review process. Both partners should contribute to writing reviews, establishing ranking, and all aspects of the review process.
- Always be conscious of giving your team the advantage of job share managers – more attention and quality input!

By managing as one, your people get all the advantages of two bosses.

Many job share teams enjoy the experience of having people call one person by the other's name. We thank them! It's a compliment, and shows that the job share is working.

Look Forward

10. Be Leaders

Successful job share teams are doing something that could benefit thousands of women, companies and the community. Other women who have off-ramped or plateaued their careers can get back on a career track with job sharing. Companies can retain top talent that is both fully engaged and highly loyal. And the community can benefit from more involvement from women who have time to contribute.

If you're in a job share, you are a role model and inspiration for others. Look for opportunities to coach and mentor other women and job share teams who could benefit from your experience and wisdom. Make time to evangelize job sharing and support others interested in pursuing it, both within and outside of your organization.

David: "I love having a job share on my team. I get two smart brains thinking about my business for the price of one."

Conclusions

Every job share, like every individual, is unique. As a job share team, you will work out the philosophy, execution and tactics to best benefit your organization and yourselves. We hope these tips help, and encourage more job shares in the workplace. We wish you much success!

If you job share, or have experience working with a job share team, we'd love to hear your story! Please contact us at team@missionjobshare.com.
