



Photography—Erica Jane
ericajane.co.nz

Words—Philippa Prentice

Rebecca & Greg Anderson, Chaos & Harmony



Together since the tender ages of 16 and 19, and married since 2003, the footwear company co-founders share how their teamwork makes the dream work.

Your Chaos & Harmony journey began when you sold your Mt Maunganui home and moved to Italy to study shoe design in 2006 – no big deal?

Greg: I'd been studying web design and front-end development, so I got a working holiday visa and was pretty much going to support Beks and just work it out, in true Kiwi she'll-be-right style.

Beks: It was much more difficult in real life. The course was really intensive and crammed almost 18 months' work into 12, so I was like, "I'll focus on studying, you figure out how to let us live."

And you figured it out, then came back to the Mount and created Chaos & Harmony. Was it a joint venture from the start?

Beks: We launched our first collection in 2009, but

Greg supporting me in my dream was probably about as joint as it was at that stage. He was working in web design and hospitality, so it was more moral support, though he also did the website. We'd always imagined working together, but hadn't quite decided in what form.

Greg: It was definitely Beks' dream and I could see her thriving, so I was doing whatever I could to support us financially. My role now is online manager, so I look after our online advertising and IT, plus I lift the stock when it comes in – I'm the muscle.

Beks: We've fine-tuned our roles in the past two years since our son Matthias started school [the couple are Mum and Dad to Matthias, 7, and Valentina, 3], so Greg also takes care of school drop-offs and pick-ups, and cooks all our food.

What's it like working and living together?

Greg: There are times when we love it and times when it's very annoying! But I get to go to work with my best mate.

Beks: We're blessed – we don't take anything for granted. We love hanging out and try to work hard, play hard, rest hard. We've also learned a lot of patience and we play to our strengths. I tend to look quite far down the track and Greg's quite now, so there's a good balance there. We're very opposite people, but we're also very complementary.

Recently, in your 'spare' time, you've started offering counselling to other couples. How did that come about?

Beks: We did the Prepare/Enrich course ourselves



“What we tend to find is there’s a lot of focus on getting married but not enough on being married. In our society, we invest in business coaching and personal development, but no one really invests in their marriage – and then they wonder why it goes wrong.”



and found it really beneficial, so we carried on and created a whole department where we have trained facilitators who work with couples. It's based at our church, but you don't have to have a faith to do it. It's just a tool people can use to have conversations they may not have had, around conflict resolution, for example.

What we tend to find is there's a lot of focus on getting married but not enough on being married. In our society, we invest in business coaching and personal development, but no one really invests in their marriage - and then they wonder why it goes wrong. This course helps couples find understanding, strength and growth opportunities in their relationship, and create a pathway for where they're going as a couple. You do an online assessment, then work with facilitators who take you through it in group sessions or one-on-one.

Greg: What it does in guy terminology is give you tools to deal with all relationships. If you've only got a hammer in your toolbox, everything looks like a nail, so it gives you lots of strategies to work through problems when they arise.

What do you know about marriage now that you wish you'd known when you got married?

Greg: That there are times when you have to put

yourself aside for the sake of the relationship. And just talk. Have open and honest conversations about how you're feeling.

Beks: We don't get it right all the time, but we've learned a lot in the past twenty-something years. It's about being on the same team. If Greg's happy, I'm happy, but it can't just be all about me or all about giving - it has to be about two people giving their best to each other.

How do you achieve work-life balance?

Beks: We kind of go with the ebb and flow. I'm a high achiever, so I have a list and thrive on getting that ticked off, but then there are days when I just don't get anything done, so I just have to go, 'Okay, scratch that, what's the most important thing at this time?'

Greg: I'm becoming a list man!

Beks: He's not.

Greg: My default is I'm not - I'm very go-with-the-flow. But because we've got kids and I do pick-ups and stuff, there are things in my day that are structured and time-bound.

Beks: I'm naturally a very structured person and Greg's not, so I've had to let that go so I don't drive everyone insane, and Greg's had to boost up a bit. We've tried to meet in the middle.

Why would you not have it any other way?

Greg: I love the work we're doing and the future we're creating, not only for us but also for our kids and customers. With our bridal range, we get to work with brides on one of the most important days of their life, and if we can help them in any way, that's awesome.

Beks: Chaos & Harmony isn't just about shoes. We often meet people on their best and worst days, so for us it's a privilege to give them some perspective or confidence. Greg and I feel the same way, so it's great to be able to give that gift together. Even though it's just shoes, it's not just shoes.

Is life together still exciting after all these years?

Greg: Oh yeah. Because we're always evolving as individuals as well.

Beks: When I think about us as teenagers, it's amazing to look back and go, 'Wow, this is what investment and hard work and not giving up looks like.'

And love.

Greg: That's the core.

Beks: Sometimes we've not necessarily liked each other, but we've always loved each other! That foundation of love and knowing where we stand in love is good.

