



Marie-Pierre Cleret  
When you know it's time

## **RELATIONSHIP BLUEPRINT**

In talking about a blueprint, I don't mean a long list of headings, each followed by bullet-points and one-word answers. Such neat lists bear little to no resemblance to the depth and complexity of real relationships. What one person means by 'honesty', for example (tell each other everything), may not remotely resemble what the other person means by it (tell me what you think I need to know, or tell me only if I ask you directly).

Instead, what I have in mind resembles more a series of scenes in a Pixar movie in the planning stages, each with a series of storyboards. Storyboards describe what happens in a scene, the emotional "feel" or tone of each scene, how characters treat one another, how each person behaves, what they work towards. In each scene, the kind of people each character shows themselves to be is revealed – kind, reserved, greedy, honest, loyal, loving, distant, thoughtful, playful, spiteful, resourceful, and so on.

For convenience, I find it easier to imagine the relationship-building as a multi-storey building. That being said, imagine each floor has a name which identifies an area of relationship that is being story-boarded. Starting on page 3, I've listed some topics that can form part of this.

Please note that the list (starting on page 3) is not exhaustive. You can edit it down or extend it further to include topics I haven't mentioned, depending on what issues strike you as important. What matters is that the key issues that do matter to you in life and relationship are there, and you're explicit as you can be about how you'd like to see things between you and a partner in relation to each issue. It's also crucial that you consider what your deal breakers are. For example, you do or don't want children, you want or don't want sexual exclusivity.

In my view, many couples fight about what's on each other's list. "You're wrong for wanting X. You should want Y". And then, they make everything worse by trying to argue in favour of their preference and dismiss their partner's preference.

Calling to mind the difference between the French and the English, I always think of how differently both languages approach a so-called compromise. The English see it as a way for both parties to get something they want by giving up some of what they wanted. The French see it first and foremost as a compromise of principles.



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I encourage my clients to try on being “honorary French people” first, by starting off with identifying what they want **before** prematurely trying to compromise by giving away any of their original requests. I urge them to see if they can propose their vision of what should happen in terms that present it as good for **both** people, not just good for one. It also moves the discussion towards a win-win orientation, rather than a “we both lose some” perspective.

So, whether you're looking to have a life partnership, or you're struggling with your existing relationship, you might consider writing out or story-boarding a relationship blueprint for yourself.

Once you've done that, consider:

1. Are you clear about what **you** need to be doing, how you need to be behaving, what values you need to be living in by in order to make your relationship blueprint possible?
2. If you're clear, ask yourself: are you deliver on that **now**? How do you conduct yourself in other relationships – friendships? Work relationships? Are there some things you need to address, to learn, or improve on?
3. Where you don't deliver on your own requirements, how do you explain this to yourself? Is it time to challenge these as excuses? What needs to change?
4. Does the blueprint you've come up with meet criteria of fair/just, honest, and sensitive for both of you? If it isn't, how do you explain this to yourself as acceptable?



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CATEGORIES	ANSWERS	DEAL BREAKERS
<p><b>Friends:</b> individual and together. Do you have separate friends? Do friends need to be always shared? Is it okay to have friends of the gender you are each attracted to? Is it okay to be friends with your ex? If yes, under what context?</p>		
<p><b>Time alone/time together:</b> Are you aware of one another's needs for alone time? If one of you needs more alone time, how is that managed in the relationship? If either of you needs to have alone time, how do you ask for it?</p>		
<p><b>Managing the household:</b> bills, cleaning, shopping, cooking, garden, and so on. How is this shared? Equally or one more than the other, or along gender role lines?</p>		



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CATEGORIES	ANSWERS	DEAL BREAKERS
<p><b>Sex and sexuality:</b> exclusive or open; fidelity; important or not important; focus on pleasure/mutuality/duty. Porn – okay or not okay? Flirting – what kind is okay and what is not okay?</p>		
<p><b>Children:</b> yes or no? Step-children (issues with management); discipline; childcare; share of responsibility for child- related tasks?</p>		
<p><b>Money:</b> shared or separate, or some shared and some separate. Who takes care of bills/budget/decisions? Savings? Retirement planning? Assets? How are decisions involving money made?</p>		
<p><b>Career:</b> one or both? Are both supported, or one more so, and why? If children are planned, how is their care factored into one or both people's careers? How is this decided?</p>		



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CATEGORIES	ANSWERS	DEAL BREAKERS
<p><b>Family:</b> contact, influence on couple decisions, importance.</p>		
<p><b>Ex-partners</b> (especially if they share parenting with one partner in the couple): contact? Influence? Friendship?</p>		
<p><b>Health:</b> is health important? If yes, how do you maintain it and support each other with it? Smoking? Exercise? Drugs, party drugs, diet, alcohol, prescription drugs? Technology, computer games, videos?</p>		
<p><b>Communication:</b> How do you communicate? Under stress, how do you want to communicate?</p>		
<p><b>Integrity and trust:</b> importance of honesty – or not? Importance of agreements being kept. Privacy – what counts as private? Are diaries, journals, phones, apps, computers open to each partner, or private?</p>		



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<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>ANSWERS</b>	<b>DEAL BREAKERS</b>
<p><b>Conflict:</b> how do you want to raise and handle conflict or controversial topics? If one partner wants something the other partner does not want, how is this to be handled? If one partner is hurt or angry about something they think the other person did or didn't do, how should that be handled?</p> <p><b>Violence:</b> is any of it okay? How would you like repairs to be made after a conflict?</p>		
<p><b>Spirituality:</b> may be religious or secular. Is this important to one or both? If it is, how will this be integrated into the household? Adaptations? If one of you has a spiritual practice and the other does not, how will this be dealt with?</p>		
<p><b>Fun and relaxation:</b> alone and/or together? What sorts of fun do you see yourselves enjoying alone/together? What place does fun/downtime have in your lives – is it important?</p>		



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<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>ANSWERS</b>	<b>DEAL BREAKERS</b>
<p><b>Creativity/interests:</b> Do you both have individual interests you'd like to continue to engage in? Is it okay for each of you to have your own interests? Any likely conflicts? How would you like to see your respective interests supported? Shared interests?</p>		