

How list-making apps could save your relationship

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Managing tasks used to burden one partner more than the other but apps such as Trello and Wunderlist are helping share the admin of daily life

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- It's the middle of the workday when a mobile notification pops up on my phone: "Luke created 'Rocking chairs' in 'Inbox'," it reads. It's from the Trello app, which means it's not urgent and it doesn't really disturb my work – I know if my partner wanted my immediate attention, he'd text. For us, a Trello note is a placeholder for something to talk about later.
- My partner, Luke, and I use the list-making app as our common digital memory. It is where everything we need to do, buy, talk about or remember goes. And it updates on both our computers and phones in real time. That afternoon, I add a few more notes myself – cat food, printer paper – to a list called 'Shopping'.
- I used to use pen and paper before Luke introduced me to Trello. He says it's "the best tracking software out there for small projects", a category in which he includes our personal life. Luke has tried lots of different list tools over the years but Trello is now his favourite.
- Task-management apps such as Trello have digitized the old-fashioned to-do list, becoming shared and always accessible repositories for everything from what's needed from the corner shop, to the plumber's phone number, the login details for the electricity bill and the idea you want to share later.
- "You start using these apps for one thing and then it creeps into other areas of your life," says Jo O'Connell. She uses Trello extensively in her PR business and with her husband, with whom she also has a private Facebook group where they document the progress of renovating a vintage caravan.
- "We're big fans of lists. We enjoy making lists so we can cross things off them!" says Will Carson, a Wunderlist fan. "But practically speaking, it allows my girlfriend and me to always have a list, be it shopping, things to get for the house or things for our daughter. The ability to have everything synced on both our phones is a godsend, as I have a memory like a sieve."
- One of the added benefits of shared task-management apps is that it can make it easier for couples and families to share the admin of daily life. This goes beyond splitting practical tasks; it also means sharing the mental work of keeping track of everything. Picking up printer paper is just half the job – equally important is noticing it needs doing in the first place and planning when to get it.
- This form of emotional labour has historically fallen disproportionately on women. Storing everything in a shared task-management tool means you're far more likely to actually share the work of remembering all the event details, login passwords, food preferences and phone numbers than have that burden fall on one partner.
- "This is something I think about a lot. I'm definitely the more organized partner and I think part of why I initiated sharing apps is that I hoped it would take some of the mental load off me," says Franki Cookney. "You're not going to alter people's personalities with this tech but at least once it's on the list, it's our responsibility, not just mine." Shared Google sheets have been invaluable for preparing for the birth of their baby, says Cookney, and they use Wunderlist for everything from shopping to meal planning with recipe links. "We sound really fun, don't we?" Cookney laughs. "But I think if you can get the boring admin stuff in your life sorted, it frees you up to do more fun stuff."
- Technology is often blamed for causing trouble in relationships, with people spending too much time on their phones. But Xiaolin Zhuo, a PhD student whose research focuses on how technology affects relationships, has found that that's not the whole story. "People in one study acknowledged that their partner sometimes got distracted but they still said technology played a positive role. A big component to this is sharing tasks," said Zhuo. Key to task-management apps is the ability to assign jobs to individuals.
- Grocery lists and household admin are the most common things for couples to share in list form but these apps are also full of bucket lists, creative goals, books, courses or memorable things that happened. "If you can write it in a list, it's been created by someone," says Simon Chan, senior product marketing manager of Microsoft To-Do. "The key is simplicity," says Chan. "There's a lot of tools for task management

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but our biggest competitor is paper. It's beautifully simple: elegant, tactile and convenient. When we build Microsoft To-Do, we want to recreate that feeling."

12 The Trello inbox I share with my partner is an ongoing brain dump: light bulb, pharmacy, China, mid-season coat, eye test. Eventually, it will be filtered down into shopping, chats and memories but getting it out of our heads and into the app is the first step to ensuring it's no longer just down to one person to remember.

13 As someone who'd never even share their email password, it's been a surprise to find myself

sharing what is basically a diary with another person. But my partner and I also have private Trello boards that we don't share and it's not like we're one of those couples who share a Facebook profile. But as Luke says, our shared tech tools do reflect the fact that we're pulling in the same direction: "That philosophy drives our tech decisions, not the other way around. We started out wanting to be a team and the tech helps us be that."

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