

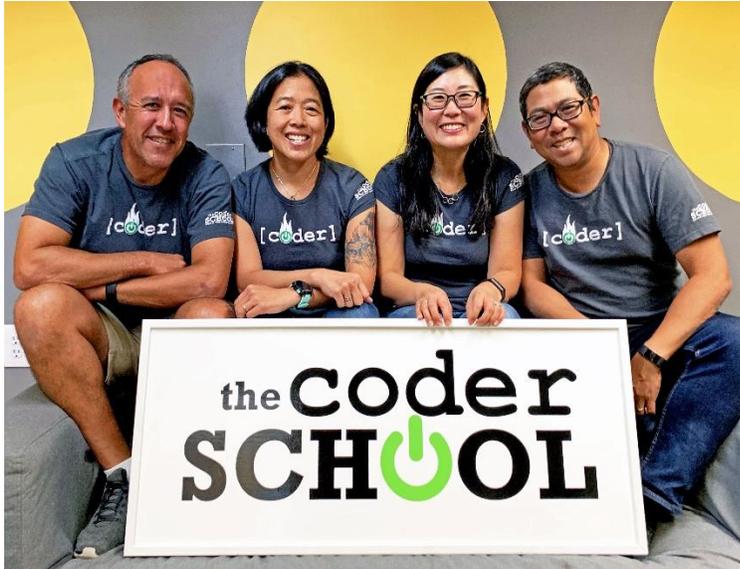
# Entrepreneur®



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## Learning to Work Together

When four friends decided to open a Coder School franchise together, they were nervous about what it could mean for their relationship. So they created a structure that left no room for gray areas. **by STEPHANIE SCHOMER**



**W**hen husband-and-wife team Dave Tjen and Lynna Tsou were considering opening a unit of theCoderSchool in Berkeley, Calif., they knew they needed partners. Both had full-time jobs (and side hustles), and they wanted another pair of brains to juggle the responsibilities. With caution, they went into business with their friends Mike and Kelly Scribner, and opened the doors to their operation in January 2017. But by taking advantage of their respective skill sets, creating clear boundaries, and remembering that they (and the seven kids between the two couples) are friends first, they've created a business that doesn't just enhance their own work lives, but one that has also become a valued part of their local community.

**How did you all decide to go into business together?**

**LYNNA:** My husband and I had been approached by the founders of theCoderSchool, who are friends of ours, about opening a location. We knew we didn't have the bandwidth to do it alone and got pretty far in the process with another couple, but they backed out. One night, we were sitting around the campfire with Kelly and Mike, talking about this dilemma. And a couple days later, they reached out: Hey, would you do this with us?"

**Were you nervous about partnering with friends?**

**MIKE:** We had heard horror stories from people who'd tried. We talked about it quite a bit. We each realized our strengths, and we knew that if we could divide responsibilities, it would be more manageable.

**So how did you do that?**

**MIKE:** Lynna is an educational psychologist, so she works with our coaches, matches students to coaches, talks to the parents. My background was in HR and customer service relationships. My wife is very detail-oriented and has sales marketing experience, and Lynna's husband, Dave, comes from a tech background and is great with numbers.

**What are some of the nuances of the local community of Berkeley you had to consider?**

**LYNNA:** We live in a college town, so we're lucky to have access to some incredible minds in terms of hiring coaches directly from the UC Berkeley campus. But we're also in a community that's highly educated and incredibly knowledgeable. Parents here can be very forthcoming and knowledgeable about what their kids' needs are. We knew we had to really meet our families where they're at, and be proactive and thoughtful in how we approach customer service.

**What kind of support do you get from the corporate office?**

**MIKE:** Very personable, approachable. You have a problem or a question? They're quick to respond. My wife and I used to operate a Color me Mine pottery studio franchise, and if we had a problem, the home office sent us a PDF or a zip file and told us to go make it happen. There wasn't much support or feedback, which was challenging. Here, it's smooth.

**Has it been difficult to hire instructors who are good at code but also good at working with kids?**

**LYNNA:** Coding ability is actually secondary. We hire coaches who know how to build connections. Part of our orientation process is teaching our instructors to step back from the computer and check in with their students, ask them how their day was. If they seem frustrated or upset, let us know, and try to find ways to comfort them. A lot of times this is the only opportunity students have to get one-on-one attention from adults. So we want to form really trusting relationships and make sure our instructors are reading their cues and body language.