

Maintaining & Strengthening Your Marriage While Working -- or Building a Business -- From Home

By: Paula Dodds

"Love isn't attaining some ethereal state of 'happily ever after.'
It is about going through the good and the bad, the joyous and
the mundane, *together*. Love is about remaining *there* – during
the worst of times, the best of times, and – most importantly –
all the times."

~ Julie Ann Barnhill, *'Til Debt Do Us Part*

A typical morning at our house goes a little something like this:

I get up first and down a quick cup of coffee while exer-cycling in the basement and watching the morning news. Then, I get to grab a quick shower.

Then, I wake my older daughter and husband. I try to feed Brady while making my husband's lunch for work and making sure her backpack has everything she needs for the morning at school. Skylar, my husband, grabs a shower and gets dressed for work. Then, I get both of them out the door. Sky drops Brady off at kindergarten on his way into work.

After this, I take ten minutes to have a bagel and skim the morning paper. By now, I'm on my third or fourth cup of coffee! Then, I go into Emma's room and get her started on her day. After we've mopped down the table, floor and walls after her breakfast, she and I head downstairs with a laundry hamper and a stack of work (and of course, yet ANOTHER cup of coffee). I check my email while she settles into her playroom with her Legos or something else of interest.

And, it's only after about an hour and a half of work, and while I'm running out the door because I'm going to be late to pick Brady up from school, that I realize I've forgotten to kiss (or talk to) my husband that day! Oh yeah... Remember him?

When all your time is spent building your business and raising your kids, where does your spouse fit in?

I have been very blessed with a husband who is so supportive of my working from home. We were both lucky enough to grow up in one-income households, a rarity even at our age that only one parent worked. Our mothers were home to raise us, along with our siblings, and run the house. They were responsible for making it a home.

And, since both of our mothers were at-home moms, it was figured out early on that I was going to stay at home with our kids while my husband was left to "bring home the bacon" (or at least the majority of the slab). The problem is that it's tough to make a budget work on just one income. Especially when you figure in credit card debt and stupid college mistakes that we're still paying for!

In balancing my work life and my home life, which often overlap when working from home, I found that I was leaving my marriage out of the equation. Somehow it got put on the back burner so I could attend to the kids, my classes, my work, the house, etc., etc., etc.... It just seemed the easiest thing to subtract time from because my husband is an adult and "he can handle it" if we cancel our night out this week, right?

Wrong!

Not only did my work begin to suffer, but the kids were picking up on the tension between my husband and myself. We were no longer “nurturing” our relationship like we needed to. We were hurting!

We had to once again make “us” a priority. Instead of listing my priorities in a set list... Businesswoman, Mom, Wife, Woman... I realized I had to re-prioritize practically each and every moment of the day. I was focusing so much on work and then on the kids, I was neglecting my husband. And, for his part, Skylar also had to re-prioritize his wants and needs. He wanted a wife to cook and clean and wait on him, but it wasn't necessarily feasible when she's also running her own company and there are two small children in the household.

But, we got through it... We both re-focused and took a long night out for ourselves to discuss the changes that needed to be made. And we made them.

One of the highest stress times in any relationship, next to a death in the family or one of you having a serious disease, is starting a business. It wears on you. And, because you're usually not alone when you choose to work from home or start a home-based business, it wears on your family. And when you and your significant other are having outside strains in your relationship and you have kids, they pick up on that. And it can all be avoided with just a few pre-emptive moves on your part!

1. Make sure you **keep the lines of communication open** with your significant other so that when you're feeling overwhelmed, or when they're feeling neglected, you can still talk to and lean on each other! Set time aside each week for “sharing.” Make sure that you're both open during these times, neither one of you should be “closed off” to hearing what the other has to say.
2. **Be honest** with each other! Don't lie about having clients or business when you don't have any. Share your triumphs and your blunders with your spouse. There's no shame in saying that you currently don't have any money coming in. With two minds working on how to bring in more business, you stand a better chance of having great brainstorming sessions!

“People often lie most readily in marriage. They know that nothing can kill the fires of passion quicker than the truth.”

~ Stanley Hauerwas & William Willimon, *Resident Aliens*

3. **Be realistic** in your expectations of your spouse. Don't expect him or her to pick up all of your slack. Some things will have to be left undone. Sky is very supportive of my working from home and building a home-based business, but there's no way that he's going to not only be the only bread-winner (at least in the beginning!), the housekeeper and the children's primary caregiver. Plus, my companion and confidante. There's just no way! And, on the flip side, he also has to be realistic in what to expect from me while building my business. He can't expect the house to be perfect (heck, some days, he's lucky that it's still standing when he gets home!), dinner on the table and the kids happy and I'm making money. Life is not that easy! Do we almost always have a healthy dinner? Yes. (Occasional take-out nights are okay. We figure them into our grocery/food budget in advance.) Is the house almost always clean? Yes. Cluttered, but clean. And, are the kids happy? Yes. The girls love me being a full-time mom. They get all the hugs and kisses they want throughout the day.

Plus, they get away with a lot while I'm working on the computer and they're playing in their adjoining playroom!

"Unrealistic expectations can bring a plethora of stress-related issues to our marriages: misunderstandings, communication breakdowns, distrust, and heated arguments, to name a few."

~ Julie Ann Barnhill, *'Til Debt Do Us Part*

4. Remember that **the grass is not always greener on the other side!** Any relationship you're in is going to need to be worked at in order to grow. Keep your relationship a priority. The top priority? Not always. But in the top of your priorities list, definitely.
5. Don't get set only on building your business or doing your WAH job. **Re-prioritize according to your day** (or hour, if the kids are REALLY little!).
6. Try to **plan a few fun things** each week for the whole family to do. Then schedule your work time around that!
7. **Take time out** of your work and family life to be in a "couple" with your significant other. Keep working on your relationship!

"Working at home may be a major change in the structure of your family. Don't assume that everything will be perfect right from the start."

~ Cheryl Demas, *The Work-at-Home Mom's Guide to Business*

8. Try to **make friends with other people with similar interests** for get-togethers that can involve the kids, but also keeps everybody separate. We get some of our cousins to come over and "baby-sit" so the adults can sit down and eat together. And the kids can all eat together at a separate picnic table.

This life as a WAHM is very rewarding. And, as the old metaphor says, "Behind every great man is a great woman." At our house, it could definitely be changed to, "Behind every great WAHM is a supportive husband."

Paula Dodds is a devoted WAH wife to her husband Skylar and mother to her two daughters, Brady, age 5, and Emma, age 2. She runs her own Virtual Assistant business www.TheVirtualChoice.com; and she's also an Independent Consultant for Kat's Coffees & More (her sales site is at www.TheCoffeeNut.com).

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