

Are You Bringing Home the Business?



Nearly one third of all Americans do some, if not all, of their work from home. At last count, over 24 million Americans own a home-based business. This trend toward working from home has a significant impact on the family as well as on the traditional relationship roles. The time-honored traditions of the male provider and female nurturer/homemaker are shifting at a rapid pace. For years, men derived their sense of identity and self-esteem from being the sole provider for the family. They knew (and expected) that they could rely on their wives to provide emotional support and a home to return to at the end of a long day. Likewise, women expected to be supported financially, leaving the “business affairs” to their husbands.



The evolution of home offices challenges the core assumptions behind these traditional relationship roles. Many women enjoy having a career identity that extends beyond their traditional role, while many men have discovered the simple pleasure of working in the environment of their choosing. We are now likely to find men and women working together as full business partners, as well as relationship partners. In addition, for many of today’s couples one partner may have started an entrepreneurial home based business, which can further blur the roles of men and women in a relationship.



Entrepreneurs need a new job description... one that allows for growing a successful business, while balancing the requirements and skills for being a relationship partner. This is not an easy task. The most common mistake of married entrepreneurs involves making “business decisions,” without knowing the possible impact on their relationship. Consider why this may happen:



Ignorance is bliss:

Some people are just not “savvy” enough to anticipate all the things that go with starting up a new business venture. Some people prefer to stay unaware of the possible negative impact and instead chart their course using a “wait and see” approach.

Blind enthusiasm:

Some people get so caught up in the “excitement” of a new business that they are not willing to consider any possibility other than being a success. Consequently, when things do take some challenging turns they set themselves up to hear the words “I told you so” from their partner.

It is critical for couples to consider how their business and career dreams will involve and affect the day to day life within their family. To effectively work from home while being a partner and parent, you need support, frequent family dialogues and strong boundaries to separate the different roles.

- Keep the lines of communication open by having regularly scheduled meetings with family members. Don’t wait for problems or a crisis before sitting down to talk.
- Get agreement about the home office. If you plan for your business office to be in a common family area, discuss exactly how and when that room will be used and the

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times of day it will be unavailable for other family members. Remember that your business interests are an inconvenience for the rest of the family, so be respectful of their wants and needs as well.

Tremendous opportunities and freedoms await those who are able to navigate the sometimes-treacherous waters of working from home. Remember that those who care will want to encourage and support you, but not at the risk of losing you and their family life to your new adventure.

Dan Haycraft, MD and Meg Haycraft, LCSW of Wilmette are the founders of TWOgether, Inc. a premier educational and counseling resource for couples. To contact them, call (847) 581-9444 or visit www.twogether.org.

