

LifeMapSM



"LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success. Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more enjoyable and abundant life."

August 8, 2006

This Week's Message:

**Dual Careers - at
Home.**

Paths Forward

Resources

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Dual Careers - at Home.

In the organizations I consult to I hear, with increasing frequency, of the stress of balancing work life and home life especially in regard to dual-career families, single parent families, and "sandwich families" (those caring for both children and elders). In this edition of LifeMap I'll share some observations of and ideas for dual career families and in future editions I'll address some of the issues facing other family configurations.

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Some researchers credit the emergence of large numbers of women into the modern workplace to labor shortages during World War II or the women's movement of the 1960's; others place blame for this development on the Industrial Revolution or the crippling inflation and stagnant economic growth of the 1970's. Regardless of your political orientation, social observations, or economic opinions this shift in the workplace (and resultantly, at home) is pervasive, growing, and here to stay. Any change (positive or negative) creates stress, and, thus, new approaches must be tried and perfected to minimize the negatives and enhance the positives of any situation. This is, of course, essential for making the dual career family work smoothly and comfortably for all involved.

I mean no disrespect for the hard and meaningful work performed by homemakers but the literature defines a dual-career family as one in which both partners work outside the home. I would like to expand this definition beyond two paychecks to include the concept that both partners seek satisfaction and purpose from their careers as well as their partnership. Some of the keys to achieving these lofty goals are open communications, developing common goals, flexibility, leaving competition at the doorstep, the willingness to negotiate, knowing when good enough is good enough, and being as interested in your partner's life satisfaction as you are in your own. Let's take a look at a few of these.

Paths Forward

- **Ask the Big Questions.** With half of U.S. marriages ending in divorce some have suggested (only half- jokingly) that you should have to take a test to get a marriage license the same way you have to take a test to get a driver's license. As one approaches a life partnership it is wise to raise and discuss with each other major life issues such as: career, children and child rearing plans, financial habits and goals, household responsibilities, sexual expectations, religious or spiritual beliefs, elder or other family responsibilities, and retirement plans. Maybe you did, maybe you didn't. But either way it is never too late for you to understand each other's approach to these issues. This is essential to establishing the common ground that will provide a basis for resolving the inevitable disagreements that will arise as life goes on.

- **Change Happens.** Maybe you completely discussed these

big issues prior to forming your household or maybe, like many, you waltzed into the relationship with stars in your eyes. Even if you and your partner were in complete agreement on every issue (hey, it could happen!) the reality is that people grow and develop, circumstances change, and conflicts develop. These pressure points are opportunities to build on love, affection and commitment to achieve new understandings and mutual growth, but they are also situations where disagreement can turn into resentment, resentment can turn into disillusionment and disillusionment can lead to separation and divorce. What is key here is the understanding that your partner and his / her attitudes are not perpetually frozen in amber and the belief that most disagreements can be resolved if that is genuinely the goal of both parties.

- **Career Symbiosis.** Whose career is more important? For whose job would we relocate and how often would we do it? Is more money our primary goal or is it mutual work satisfaction? How willing am I to make career trade-offs for my partner's comfort or achievement? If these questions can be satisfactorily addressed (and not necessarily with consistent, 100% agreement) then career symbiosis (dual-careers that support rather than compete with each other) can be achieved.

- **Discard the "Shoulds".** Women should work outside the home. Women should stay home with their children. Men should be willing to stay home with children if his partner makes more money. Men should be able to completely financially support his family. With all that money, dual-career couples should have it all: career, marriage, kids, a great sex life, active social life, exciting vacations, rewarding hobbies. Says who?? No one knows which path, what arrangements, what roles, what compromises will work best for your family. You must find your own path and define roles that work for both of you in your unique situation with your unique combination of beliefs and goals.

- **Split the Duty Roster.** Oh, here's another "should" to discard. Child rearing, household chores etc. should be split 50/50. Hey, if that works for you, great. The real issue isn't measuring time spent on homefront issues with a stopwatch. The issue is fairness. Do you do your fair share? Do you pull your weight? Does your partner think so? If not, it's major discussion time.

- **This, Too, Shall Pass.** Nothing lasts forever. Obnoxious

bosses come and go. Student loans are eventually paid off. Year-end budgets and tax seasons come and go. Children eventually sleep through the night. Contractors eventually finish the household project. The dog is eventually housebroken. The trials and tribulations that most dual-career families face on a day-to-day basis are often temporary. But when you're suffering from stress it sure is hard to believe this. Sometimes the best strategy is to take a deep breath, relax and hold on until tomorrow.

● **Communication Doesn't Just Happen.** Underpinning all of the above ideas and strategies is the need for communication. It is essential to understand that effective communication doesn't happen just because we have our cell phones, our PDAs, our email and our pagers (though all are great tools for coordinating schedules and reminding someone to bring home some milk). Sharing your goals, needs, hopes and fears and learning those of your partner's is an essential and on-going necessity in any true partnership and is the foundation upon which any successful dual-career family is built

LifeMap is about helping you build the family structure that nourishes, supports and rewards all family members.

Resources

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