

COVER STORY: HUSBAND FOR HIRE

NEWLY UNEMPLOYED, MEN REDEFINE BREADWINNING ROLES AND GO TO WORK FOR THEIR WIVES

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Author: ERIN CHAN DING
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Sometimes in the offices of Brides-to-Be Shows in Clinton Township, where lollipops peek out from a pink basket and a heart-shaped photo hangs on the refrigerator, Don Evanowski forgets.

He acts as if he and Cyd LaChiusa Evanowski are just husband and wife. But then they have a disagreement. That's when, he says, "I always cave in when I realize she is the boss."

Evanowski is vice president of Brides-to-Be, a company owned by his wife that hosts bridal expos throughout metro Detroit. He joined the staff in late 2007 after taking a forced retirement from Chrysler.

Entrepreneurial wives like Cyd LaChiusa Evanowski are finding that their companies may be the best places for their out-of-work husbands.

It's an employment prospect that changes the professional power dynamic while complicating the nature of marriage.

"I feel a lot of stress," says LaChiusa Evanowski, 54, who estimates that her husband brings in \$50,000 less a year since his retirement. "Brides-to-Be was an extra to his income -- a very, very nice extra. Now it's very primary."

Don Evanowski, 60, has a lot of male company. Men in Michigan are more likely to be unemployed than women.

In 2008, the unemployment rate for women was 7.4% while that of men hit 9.1%, according to Rick Waclawek, director of labor marketing information and strategic initiatives for the state's Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth. The reason, he says, is that manufacturing and construction, industries that tend to employ more men than women, are hit particularly hard during a recession.

For couples with work arrangements like the Evanowskis, the initial discomfort

with the wife as the authority figure is exacerbated by the societal perception that husbands should have the higher incomes, says clinical psychologist Irene Swerdlow-Freed.

"The expectations of roles would have to fluctuate and change, and communication would have to be improved" between the couple, says Swerdlow-Freed, who co-owns her Farmington Hills-based practice with her husband, psychologist Daniel Swerdlow-Freed. "Otherwise, they're going to be kind of arguing all the time."

Susan Myers, 53, says that when she and her husband, Monte Myers, decided he would become her office manager, "all my family thought we would be divorced in a week. Our children were begging us not to do it. But we are still here."

In December, Monte Myers, 55, joined his wife's Center for Wealth Management, an office of MetLife based in Troy.

He had approached early retirement as a senior manager of heavy-duty truck interiors at Chrysler, with the intention of working for suppliers or auto-related consultants. But the suppliers he used to deal with weren't hiring and he thought, "Maybe I should just focus on helping make her successful."

At first, taking orders from his wife felt strange.

"Just having to learn to take direction from your wife throughout the day can be a little uncomfortable for some, and it was for me," says Myers, of Clarkston. "What you do comes directly from her all the time. It's not a 50/50 thing, as it would kind of be in a marriage."

When the Evanowskis, who live in Shelby Township, have a disagreement at Brides-to-Be, Cyd says "I think this office goes a little crazy."

Patty Gammicchia, vice president of sales, and office assistant Germaine Salinger have worked for Brides-to-Be for more than two decades. They joke that they close their doors when they sense a husband-wife argument, but there's no uncertainty about which one they take their orders from.

"Don signs my check," says Salinger. "But I have to listen to Cyd."

The wife-as-CEO circumstance also puts her company at the forefront of providing for the family's financial needs.

At its peak, Jan Leon Woznick's job as a marketing executive brought in a steady six-figure income, more than his wife, Pam Ode-Woznick, made as a freelance photographer and interior designer. But he joined Focus on You Photography, the company owned by Ode-Woznick and based out of their home in Bloomfield Township, after advertising and marketing business from auto-related companies

grew scarce.

The couple, who are in their mid-50s, have had to dip into their retirement savings and are more conscious of expenses.

"I can't tell you the last time either one of us had a major clothing purchase," says Woznick. "We hang around in our Levis and sweatshirts."

Like Ode-Woznick, CEO wives have to assign tasks and responsibilities that fit their husbands' skills and, in turn, that will help their company thrive.

Susan Myers says that as office manager, her husband has "sort of imposed some order, which was much needed and appreciated."

Don Evanowski, who worked in program management at Chrysler, has taken over the more technical aspects of Brides-to-Be, like billing and bookkeeping. Woznick's management of marketing and logistics for Focus on You Photography has almost doubled client volume in the past year.

Ode-Woznick remains the creative head and ultimate decision-maker, though her husband jokes that "every once in a while, I disagree with her, and I don't get dinner that night."

Contact ERIN CHAN DING: 313-222-6696 or echan@freepress.com.

(SIDEBARS)

Work together, stay together

Here's some stay-sane advice for couples who work together, especially when the wife is the boss:

Amp up communication: If the wife is the boss, "all of a sudden, she has power that she didn't have before," says Irene Swerdlow-Freed, a clinical psychologist based in Farmington Hills. The husband might have emotional baggage to deal with because he would be unemployed if not for his wife, and it all needs to be talked about on a regular basis to avoid any resentment, she says.

Decide who will make final decisions: If the wife is the head of the company, the husband needs to be able to present his ideas and feel that she is listening to him. At the same time, says Swerdlow-Freed, the couple needs to decide up front who will make the ultimate business decisions in various areas - and make it clear to other employees - so there are no misunderstandings.

Talk about household tasks: If it falls to the wife to run the business, she likely won't be able to also clean the house and do the laundry and take care of the kids and do the grocery shopping and, you get it. If the couple decides the husband will work less at the office, he may also need to take on more of the

household chores. On the flip side, he could have more free time to pursue leisure interests.

Create a safe space and time: Have a specific place in the house and a certain time of day when you do not discuss business. Susan and Monte Myers, who work at her financial planning company in Troy, get a lot of their business discussions out of the way during their daily commute together. Relationship expert April Masini of www.askapril.com specifically says to stay away from business talk in the bedroom because "there's nothing like work to kill your sex life."

Don't be afraid to treat your spouse the way you would another coworker: If there are other employees, be aware of situations that could evoke accusations of favoritism. If you have business to discuss that you know could make emotions flare, writes Masini, get away to another setting, like a meeting room or coffee shop. Breaking out of typical work boundaries can help you cool down.

Have your own work spaces: "Have your own desk, your own phone line, your own filing system," says Swerdlow-Freed, who owns a practice with her husband, Daniel. "We have different ways of working. He's neater, and I tend to be sloppier."

Base assignments on who's better at certain things: Talk about each other's strengths and weaknesses; assign tasks accordingly.

When work problems arise, make a list: Swerdlow-Freed says she and her husband write down work conflicts as a list of items to talk about so they don't get distracted by a jumble of issues. The key is to resolve one problem before moving onto the next.

Remember that you're married: When you're not working, go on dates together. Have fun. Keep acting like a married couple when you're not at the office.

The spouse and the house

Husbands working for their wives say they have taken on more domestic duties and even found some of it palatable.

*Don Evanowski, who works about one-third of the hours his wife does at her company, Brides-to-Be Shows, has discovered a fondness for cooking: "Salmon, roasts, pasta. I'm really into that."

*Monte Myers is an office manager at his wife's company, Center for Wealth Management, an office of MetLife in Troy. He has become familiar with the aisles of Costco and Meijer, especially on his extra day off, Thursdays. That's the day he does the grocery shopping -- after taking care of home repairs and laundry.

ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION: Former marketing exec Jan Leon Woznick began working for his wife, Pam Ode-Woznick, last year.

Monte and Susan Myers

Monte Myers, who took an early retirement from Chrysler, now works for his wife, Susan Myers.

SUSAN TUSA / Detroit Free Press

Brides-to-Be Vice President Don Evanowski, with marketing VP Patricia Gammicchia, joined his wife Cyd's company in 2007 after he retired from Chrysler.