

Significant Others: Are You A 'Power Couple?'

Couples often make the strongest mobile tool distributors; what about you?

BY PHIL SASSO, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



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One dealer told me his wife was so sold on him becoming a dealer that she completed and submitted the application packet before telling him. He had talked about "someday" becoming a dealer. She took the initiative for him. Today, he's a successful mobile distributor.



Rick and Krissi Hodges have worked as a team successfully for years as an independent distributor in Watkinsville, GA.

Q I'm considering starting my own business as a tool guy. How important is it to get my wife on board in the business?

A I believe behind most successful dealers are supportive spouses.

That doesn't mean your spouse needs to be involved in the day-to-day stuff. Some are, some aren't. But when you own a tool and equipment business, it's really a family business. Although there's a tremendous freedom, there are also issues that will affect your entire family. It's a decision best made together.

At the very least, your wife should be sold on the idea of being in business and all that means. She may even be willing to commit to managing some ongoing tasks.

As with any business, there are big time and financial commitments. Consider creating a list of pros and cons of becoming a dealer and be sure you can live with them. Without your spouse buying in on it, your dealership can become a tremendous source of contention. And it can be hard to focus on selling tools and equipment when your head is not in the game. Most dealers understand this and reach out to their wives.

Q My girlfriend wants to get involved in my business. What should I do?

A If you're asking for relationship advice, you're out of my league. I'm not "Dear Amy!" But if you want her involved and you're asking how to plug her in, I can speak to that. You don't want to create unnecessary tension. So, first decide upfront what you'll

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do if either of you decides it's not working out. Then decide what she's comfortable doing. Once you've decided on the job, be sure you give her the freedom to do it. It can be easy to micromanage or criticize. I know. I work with my wife, Beth. If I've learned anything over 15 years of marriage, it's that I tend to be a micromanager.

Wives and girlfriends tend to gravitate to bookkeeping, ordering or stocking. But that's not for everyone. Some

spouses/girlfriends are also involved in more creative ways. For example, Cornwell dealer Arnie Lindahl, who serves the outskirts of Portland, OR, says his wife Nancy has regularly baked cookies for guys on his route since he launched nearly nine years ago.

The best way to partner up is to pair the personality and skills with the tasks.

Q There's a tool dealer retiring in my district. I showed my wife the February Professional Distributor story about the woman distributor, and told her she should take over the route. It could double our income. What do you think?

A I'm not sure if you're teasing her -- or me. Assuming you're serious, I can see you

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SALES Q & A

presenting my column to your wife, encouraging her to get her own route and then getting a nasty letter from her blaming me for a job she hates and a huge financial obligation. So I'll steer clear of that.

Let me start with the obvious: the tool business isn't for everyone. You need a certain personality and skill set to succeed. Your wife might love it and be great at it. Or she may not. You can't force her to become something she isn't. So even if she's willing to try it, it's best to test it out first.

Tony Orts, a Mac Tools dealer in suburban Chicago, once asked his wife, Debi, to take over his route on Fridays so he could have a "play day." She did well, but after a while, Debi grew tired of working while he was off having a good time. So she "quit."

"It was a good run while it lasted," laughs Orts. His wife isn't involved in the day-to-day business any longer, but she will help out occasionally as needed.

So ask your wife to try your route for a few days. Show her the ropes, then send her out on her own. If she thinks she would do well, give a second truck some serious consideration. If she's uncomfortable, at least she'll be able to take over your route for a day or two if you get stuck with jury duty or need a sick day (or play day).

And don't count on a second truck doubling your income. There might be some economies of scale, but it can also be a huge drain on your energy and finances. If she has her own truck, she won't be able to pitch in and help you as often. Maybe you can cover more ground and increase your profits by working the



Shannon Sledge fills in on the truck for her husband, Matt, an independent in Murfreesboro, TN

same truck together. Working together isn't for every couple. Seriously consider all the angles of a new truck or working together before you dive in headfirst. ■

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