



REPORTS & COMMENT

NOTES WORK MARRIAGE

IDON'T WORK in an office, so I miss out on a lot of things that people who do don't, such as a new pen whenever I want one, coffee breaks, comical stories about my dumb boss, the concept of the weekend, lunchtime jazzercise with my co-workers, a mysteriously burgeoning colony of Sweet 'N Low packets in my desk, nice clothes for daytime wear, and work marriage.

Work marriage is a relationship that exists between certain people of the opposite sex who work at the same place. For example, let's suppose that you, like me, are a man. In that case your work wife would be the woman in your office who

- (a) as you walk past her desk on your way to a big meeting, tells you that you have dried shaving cream behind your ear
- (b) has lunch with you pretty often
- (c) returns stuff she borrows from your desk
- (d) tells you things about her other (home) husband that he wouldn't want you to know
- (e) waits for you to finish up so you can go down in the elevator together
- (f) complains to you without embarrassment about an uncomfortable undergarment
- (g) expects you to tell her the truth, more or less, about the thing she has done to her hair
- (h) doesn't comment on how much you eat, drink, and smoke
- (i) knows at least one thing about you—such as the fact that you can do a

pretty good imitation of Liza Minnelli—that your home wife doesn't know.

Work marriage is, in some ways, better than home marriage. For example, your work wife would never ask you why you don't just put your dishes right into the dishwasher instead of leaving them in the sink—she doesn't know you do it! Also, she would never get your car wedged between two other cars in the parking lot at Bradlees, sign you up to be the pie auctioneer at a church bazaar, or grab hold of your stomach and ask, "What's this? Blubber?" She knows you only as you appear between nine and five: recently bathed, fully dressed, largely awake, and in control of your life.

My wife and I both work at home. In that sense, I guess, my home wife is also my work wife. And yet this cannot be. Our argument about whether rapidly changing channels hurts the TV does not disappear at nine o'clock on Monday morning. Like many other self-employed (and thus work-single) people, I am forced to content myself with fleeting and ultimately unsatisfying pseudo work marriages, such as my relationship

with a check-out girl at the grocery store. She has a pretty good idea of what I like to eat, and I help her out sometimes by doing my own bagging, but that is about as far as it goes. (Perhaps I have merely discovered a new, less committed type of relationship: store dating.)

The only way to have a real work marriage is, sadly, to work. Sure, I'd like a work wife someday—*someday*. But I'm not willing, right now, to get a regular job in order to have one. There are just too many things about offices (no dogs or children, no nap whenever you want one, parking problems) that rub me the wrong way.

Meanwhile, my home wife and I keep trying to work out our differences. There are some indications that we are making progress. The other day she borrowed the ruler-alarm clock-thermometer that I use to hold down the pile of papers on my desk. This morning, without any hint from me, she brought it back. Next week maybe I'll return her scissors.

—David Owen



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