

# desperate households



How to restore order and harmony to your life and home

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A FAMILY MANAGER RESOURCE

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*Desperate Households: How to Restore Order and Harmony to Your Life and Home*

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**“You will soon break the bow if you keep it always stretched.”**

Phaedrus

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**“The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.”**

Proverbs 14:1

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**“There are risks and costs to a program of action, but they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.”**

John F. Kennedy

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# Is This Your Life?

## Lauren M.

*6:40 a.m. Monday*

- The radio alarm blares in Lauren's ear after too few hours of rest.
- She jumps into the shower and speed-washes her hair.
- As she dries off, she stares blankly into her closet, wondering what to wear.
- She throws on her bathrobe. She'll figure it out after breakfast.
- She yells to make sure her three kids are up as she walks downstairs to get out the cereal and make lunches.
- Oh no, the milk is spoiled!
- She chides herself for not checking the expiration date and ransacks the freezer in search of bagels.
- Her twelve-year-old daughter storms into the kitchen and blows up because her jeans haven't been washed.
- Her eight-year-old daughter walks in crying because she lost her spelling book—again.
- As they frantically search room by room for the book, she discovers her five-year-old son happily playing a video game—still in his pajamas.
- She grits her teeth to avoid spewing angry words.
- She silently fumes over her husband's demanding job. He's never there when she needs him.
- With all the self-control she can muster, Lauren tells herself to take a few deep breaths and regroup so the kids won't miss the school bus.

- 
- Never mind, she'll drive them to school and pick up breakfast on the way.
  - No, she changes her mind . . . that won't work. She has a 9:00 meeting with an important client, and if she drives the kids, she won't make it.
  - The clock's ticking.
  - She's not dressed and her hair's still wet.
  - She feels a migraine coming on.
  - She wonders why this is so hard.
  - She closes her eyes and thinks back to her college days.
  - She graduated summa cum laude and was destined for success.
  - Now she feels like a failure.

## **Nicole W.**

*5:30 p.m. Tuesday*

- Nicole studies the list of tasks she scribbled before breakfast.
- She has been going nonstop all day and hasn't accomplished anything on the list.
- Her three-month-old is fussy.
- Dinner . . . hmmm, she hasn't thought about that yet.
- Her husband walks in and asks what she's been doing all day. (She hates it when he does that.)
- The phone rings. Distractedly, she answers it.
- It's her neighbor calling to brag that she buffed her floors, cleaned her windows, and baked cupcakes for the soccer team. Dinner's in the oven, so she's heading out for a walk. Would Nicole like to join her?
- *No, I don't want to go for a walk with your sorry size-two self,* is all Nicole can think of saying.

- 
- She bites her tongue and declines the invitation.
  - Then she catches a reflection of her disheveled, out-of-shape body in the window.
  - She's wearing the same sweats she put on the last three mornings.
  - How could this be? This time last year she was cute, together, competent.
  - She was thrilled to learn her pregnancy test was positive.
  - Holding her baby for the first time, she knew going back to work would be tough.
  - She resigned from her position to give motherhood and managing her home her full attention.
  - Now her life feels out of control.
  - She feels incompetent, depressed.
  - She managed a team of people at the office. Why is managing one small person and her own life now so challenging?

## **Allison G.**

*3:17 a.m. Wednesday*

- Allison turns over to block out her husband's snoring.
- Countless problems flood her mind.
- She thinks back to the day she noticed a For Sale sign in front of the house of her dreams.
- She'd always wanted a fixer-upper with charm.
- The location was perfect—a short commute for her husband and close to the school where she is a teacher and their children are students.
- They would enjoy working as a family, painting and updating on the weekends.
- The house was livable as is, even with the ugly bathrooms.

- 
- The hideous kitchen wallpaper was the only thing she couldn't abide. It had to go immediately.
  - She would look for a pattern that better expressed her personality—bright and cheery.
  - Now, eight months after moving in, they've made minimal progress.
  - Stacks of unopened boxes occupy most of the garage.
  - Paper plates have become the norm.
  - The bedrooms are barely functional. The kids have become accustomed to dressing out of the laundry basket.
  - The bathrooms are still ugly.
  - The insufferable kitchen wallpaper has yet to be replaced.
  - She admits this may not be a bad thing—wallpaper reflecting her irritable personality would look worse.
  - She blames her husband for the way things have turned out. He blames her.
  - She doesn't like the person she has become.
  - She's weary of living in chaos.
  - She doesn't know how much longer she can take it.

## **Beth Ann J.**

*2:35 p.m. Thursday*

- Beth Ann looks at her watch, wondering if her seven-year-old daughter is feeling better.
- This morning she complained of a scratchy throat.
- Now she wishes they had both stayed home, but she can't afford to miss another day of work.
- The fact that she's a single mom still seems surreal.
- When her husband asked for a divorce, she was shocked. She never suspected his affair.



- 
- Child support has been spotty. She's stretching to make ends meet.
  - She hates sending her daughter to after-school care.
  - There's a mandatory staff meeting this afternoon, so her daughter will likely be the last one picked up.
  - Then there's the question of dinner. Fast food *again*?
  - She promised her daughter that she could invite some friends for a sleepover this weekend. Would she mind postponing—*again*?
  - The house is a wreck. She hasn't cleaned in weeks. Dirty laundry is piled high.
  - Her cell phone rings. It's the school nurse. Her daughter has a fever.
  - Overwhelmed by her responsibilities, she struggles to hold back the tears and tells the nurse she's on her way.
  - She should probably stop at the store for some food.
  - As much as she deplors their unhealthy eating habits, she can't seem to find any time to cook.
  - The bills need paying. They'll have to wait.
  - She hasn't seen her friends in months.
  - She blots tears from her eyes.
  - She's got to pull herself together for her daughter.

## **Meredith B.**

*10:10 p.m. Friday*

- The house is quiet.
- Meredith is home alone, clipping and organizing coupons in the family room.
- She turns on the news so she can catch tomorrow's weather forecast.
- If it's sunny she wants to power wash the windows.

- 
- She'll persuade her husband to clean the gutters and weed the flower beds. He wants to go to the boat show, but that's not going to happen.
  - She runs a tight ship. Never wastes time.
  - Their house is spotless, hygienic.
  - Their closets and drawers are fit for a king (or queen).
  - Her children keep their rooms immaculate or risk indefinite grounding.
  - She allows no food outside the kitchen.
  - She constantly nags her husband to pick up his belongings.
  - She never has time to relax and has no tolerance for family members who do.
  - Her family doesn't appreciate the housework she does, but she reminds them of it often.
  - Lately, she's noticed that her kids only want to hang out at their friends' homes.
  - *That's okay, she tells herself, less mess for me to clean up.*
  - Her husband is staying later at the office, even on Fridays.
  - This morning she asked him what was so vital at work. He told her that the office is more pleasant than their home.
  - He said he didn't care if the house is spotless. It's boring living with a woman who never has any fun.
  - He said life's too short.
  - Tonight she stays on task with her chores, but she's feeling lonely.
  - She wonders if she could be driving her family away.



# When Happily Ever After Isn't What You Expected

Desperation. Most of us arrive at this destination in one way or another at some point in life. We wake up one day and realize that things are out of control—and we're not quite sure how they got that way. Somehow issues about our home, marriage, kids, schedules, career, finances, appearance, in-laws, or blended families have collided, and life feels like it's on the verge of unraveling.

So where did things go wrong? Before marriage, all of us dreamed of a happy home. Hand in hand with the love of our life, we'd take on the world. We'd start a family and be exceptional parents. We'd create a warm and welcoming home, make family dinnertime an honored tradition, and host memorable celebrations for family and friends.

Sure, these were lofty dreams, but we all thought we could do it. None of us vowed to create a chaotic home and miserable life when we stood at the altar and said, "I do." But as one harried mother put it, "I love my family, but I sure didn't sign up for this."

Even homes that start out on solid footing slip out of control. Maybe you and your husband had good premarital counseling and began married life with a well-thought-through plan. Since you both had jobs in the marketplace, you split household chores down the middle—keeping your home neat, clean, and party-ready for the friends you love to entertain.

Fast-forward to now. Perhaps your first child was born a few months ago, and you had to return to your job to make ends meet. You snatch every spare minute when you're at home to rock your baby and pump breast milk. Clutter and dust have established strongholds in your once tidy adults-only environment. Now you wonder if you'll ever entertain—or even see your friends—again.

Or maybe you're the kind of woman whose feathers never have ruffled easily. Your parents and schoolteachers used to brag about your sense of calm and composure. Nowadays, just walking into your messy home at the end of a difficult day puts you over the edge. You stand there staring at the floors and

Even the most composed of us can come unglued.                                      countertops strewn with toys, papers, and dirty dishes. The kids pull at your shirttail asking what's for dinner, and all you want to do is walk back out the door, get in the car, and start driving. Anywhere.

All mothers—even those seemingly perfect moms (which they are not)—have challenges and bad days. No one is

exempt from a two-year-old's tantrums, a teen's rebellion, broken appliances, leaky roofs, faltering finances, cranky mates, and dashed dreams of a better or different life. There's simply no such thing as a perfect home, a perfect family, or a personal life without room for improvement.

However, there is such a thing as a *good* home—a place where family members (yourself included) walk through the door and think, *Boy, is it good to be here!* There's also such a thing as a good family—where uniquely gifted opposites live together in harmony and help one another develop their God-given potential. And there is such a thing as a constantly improving personal life—one in which you're learning daily to draw on God's unconditional love and promised strength to help you manage your home, balance your schedule, make wise decisions, love others patiently, face crises courageously, and grow toward your own personal best. In a nutshell, that's what you will learn how to do in this book.

### **It's Never Too Late for Things to Change**

Perhaps you're thinking, *Easy for you to say, Kathy Peel. But I'm not like you, and you don't know how bad things are at my house.*

You're right. I probably don't know you and how bad things have gotten. But I do know this. Although I'm not much of a gambler, I'd bet money that I'm more like you than you think, and there were times my home was at least as bad—or even worse—than yours.

When people hear me introduced as America's Family Manager (after Oprah Winfrey called me this, the moniker stuck), they are sometimes surprised to hear that I'm not instinctively organized. After all, what's America's Family

"I will strengthen you  
and help you."

*(Isaiah 41:10)*

Manager, if not organized?

The reality is that learning  
to manage my home and fam-  
ily did not come easily or

quickly. Instead, it was born out of a series of failures. Some of the things you'll read are downright embarrassing for me to tell. You see, when I married, I was close to totally incompetent in almost every area of Family Management. These stories don't make me proud, but I share them with you to give you hope. I now can see how the lessons I learned from each blunder contributed to a system that today keeps our family and thousands of other families on track. Trust me, no matter how bad your circumstances seem now, they can get better!

Throughout this book, I tell stories about real families with real issues (including my own). The women profiled worked with me or a certified Family Manager Coach who has completed interactive and online training through our Family Manager University. These coaches evaluated the families' areas of concern, and together they created a plan to improve these women's household management skills. Throughout the book, you'll find details of their makeover plans, along with

strategies you can implement to address your own frustrations in ten common areas.

Over the years, it has been an honor to participate in many household makeovers, some of them for television programs, others for magazine articles and newspaper stories. I believe that God put me in each family's life for a reason. Before each media opportunity, I always pray that He will give me the ability to focus on each family and their issues (not on the journalist or photographer who's following me around) and to know which solutions will bring them relief.

The people who open their homes to Family Manager makeover teams are not statistics or easy targets who want their fifteen minutes of fame. They are real men, women, and children searching for answers and hope that their lives will get better—and that maybe their stories can help other people in the process.

Homes can't be completely turned around in the time it takes to tape a five-minute segment or thirty-minute show, but people do begin to see how simple changes can transform their lives. Everyone, including me, learns lessons during the makeovers. We all want home to be a place where we can escape the stress of the outside world. We're all reminded that no one is good at everything and that there's hope for all.

During these makeovers, I've seen husbands and wives rekindle their relationships, single moms bring balance to their overburdened lives, and parents and children develop

team spirit and learn to communicate in healthier ways. I've seen basements and closets once piled high with years of accumulated stuff become organized and useful places. Perhaps most rewarding, I've seen women rediscover their inestimable worth and find time for self-care and development. It's a privilege to see lives transformed when basic Family Management principles are applied. For me, nothing compares to watching

"The best educated human is the one who understands most about the life in which he is placed."

—Helen Keller

desperation morph into purpose, accomplishment, and a deeper connection with family members. As you read about the women in this book, you'll

discover how you, too, can make significant changes in your home and personal life—starting today!

But please note: The strategies in this book will not make your husband faultless, your children flawless, or your home spotless, nor will they make you richer or slimmer or solve all your problems overnight. They can, however, change your home, your family, and your life in many positive ways. They will make you wiser and more confident about how you spend your time, communicate with your family, manage your home, use your money, and care for your body. You will learn how to live each day to the fullest and get on track with God's purposes for your life. These are satisfying rewards for any of us.

What about you? Do you dream of a better life? Do you feel



..... Introduction .....

desperate about a few areas of your life—or about your life as a whole? If so, you’ve come to the right place! And it might surprise you to learn that desperation is not such a bad place to be. In fact, it’s a good place. Because if you’re headstrong like I am, often you have to hit rock bottom before you’re willing to grab onto a lifeline and get pulled out and pointed in the right direction—fast-forward—to a smoothly running home and a balanced, fulfilling life.

Grab on . . . it’s going to be a great ride!

**Kathy Peel**

**“The woman who creates and sustains a home, and under whose hands children grow up to be strong and pure men and women, is a creator second only to God.”**

Helen Hunt Jackson

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**“A home is a kingdom of its own in the midst of the world, a stronghold amid life’s storms and stresses, a refuge, even a sanctuary.”**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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**“I value this delicious home-feeling as one of the choicest gifts a parent can bestow.”**

Washington Irving



# Thinking Rightly about the Role

..... *What Family Management Is All About*

When you feel desperate because some key areas of your household are out of control, all you may care about is finding that one magical tip or strategy that will restore order to your home—ASAP.

If that's how you feel, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that you *can* bring your household under control—and it may not take as long as you think. The bad news is that it won't come from discovering one foolproof technique. Instead, it will happen as you embrace your role as your family's manager and learn to use your expertise and creativity to direct the day-to-day functioning of your home. That's why I devote the first three chapters of this book to helping you understand your role, your unique giftedness, and your priorities. Please note that this is about *you*—not about making you manage your home and life a certain way. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I must first stress that every home needs a Family Manager—a person who oversees the household from the perspective of an executive manager of the most important organization in the world. Family Management, like all other good management, is not about a dictator imposing arbitrary standards from on high. It's about sharing responsibility, helping each person find his or her niche, and empowering each one to succeed. In our family, I'm the Family Manager and my husband, Bill, is Chairman of the Board. We both participate in the operations of our home and take very seriously the job of building equity, if you will, into our home and family.

Like top-level corporate executives, Bill and I are peers and colleagues, and are committed to the same mission and values. But when push comes to shove, the buck has to stop somewhere—and the way we understand God's organizational hierarchy, it stops with Bill.

*What!* you gasp. *I thought you were an independent, opinionated, modern, liberated woman!*

Guilty as charged . . . and, quite frankly, it is indeed liberating to know that God holds my husband ultimately responsible for the Peel family. But I digress. The point here is that the job of Family Manager is a valuable, executive-level position, and we need to get over any preconceived Stepford-wife notions about what it means to oversee the goings-on of a home and family.

In the majority of homes, Mom is the Family Manager, but

in some households it makes more sense for Dad to be the Family Manager. I wrote this book from a woman's perspective and with women in mind, but the principles and strategies work no matter who the Family Manager is. And it's important for everyone in the family to understand the value of this role and treat the person who fills it with respect.

**Every Mom Is a Working Mom**

Although we've made progress over the past ten years, the "Do you work?"

question is still awkward for many women. Women who do not work outside the home often flinch at this question, because they work all day and their work is never done. Those who have tabled professional careers to raise a family find themselves not only defending their choice but also suffering unwanted pity: "How sad to think you gave up your career as an IT professional [or attorney, marine biologist, or whatever]." Others may ask them angrily, "How could you let your education go to waste?" People who ask questions like that have, in my opinion, never spent even one day with a curious three-

In some households, couples decide that, because of salary, benefits, job security, giftedness, and a host of other reasons, Dad should stay at home while Mom goes out to work. If this is the case at your house, keep in mind that both men and women deserve respect and appreciation for the work they do in the home.

year-old. Young children are not people upon whom education is wasted.

The “Do you work?” question can also be touchy for mothers who have jobs in the marketplace. They typically answer

“Whereas the service rendered the United States by the American mother is the greatest source of the country's strength and admiration; and Whereas we honor ourselves and the mothers of America when we do anything to give emphasis to the home; and Whereas the American mother is doing so much for good government and humanity, we declare that the second Sunday of May will henceforth be celebrated as Mother's Day.”

*—Presidential Proclamation, 1914*

the question with what they do to earn a paycheck as a real estate broker, sales manager, nurse-practitioner, etc. Whether they spend twenty or sixty hours a week “on the job,” they still have to come home and spend more hours cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry. In response to the “Do you work?” question, many of them reply, “I sure do work. I'm holding down two full-time jobs—one at my office and one at home.”

In 1969, the seminal days of the working-mother debate, I was a college sophomore. I first heard in one of my humanities classes that it was boorishly backward—at least in the minds of the campus intel-

lectuals—for a woman to even consider marrying and starting a family rather than pursuing her degree career path. Almost forty years later, sparks still fly between people on both sides of the issue.

I read an article a few months ago that made me want to give the journalist a piece of my mind (which I can ill afford to lose). She stated that full-time motherhood is not good for women because they lose out professionally, not good for men because they don't get to spend as much time fathering their children, not good for the kids because they grow up gender biased, and not good for the community because women who stay at home with their children are not contributing to the broader community as doctors, lawyers, social workers, and such—which is their duty as good citizens.

I wondered, *What planet is this woman from?* I researched her background and learned that she teaches women's studies at a college and does not have children herself (at least at the time she wrote the article). I wrote a lengthy response to her article, but she did not respond. Following is the bulk of my reply.

When I became a mother over thirty years ago, I chose to stay home with my children, and it did not infringe on my husband's desire to be an involved father. He cleaned up baby vomit, drove carpools, coached teams, and to their delight and better health, cooked a whole lot of dinners.

As a stay-at-home mother, I did not lose out professionally, and our community did not suffer. When my children were young, I continued my education by reading books, taking classes, and learning new skills. I put in many hours volunteering at my children's schools, for community service organizations and political campaigns, and at church. Waiting awhile to pursue another career, in addition to my career as a Family Manager, did not compromise my ability to achieve success in the marketplace today as an author and CEO of a company. (I can't brag about my 401(k), but it's a small price to pay for great kids, a strong marriage, and a family that still functions as a team although we're separated by miles.)

When it comes to "women's work" and "men's work," full-time mothering did not cause my children to grow up gender biased. Our three boys learned that men are just as capable as women of mopping a floor and recognizing the aroma of a diaper that needs changing, and that women can run hospitals and corporations equally as well as men. Our sons also learned that smart management, of an office or a home, means delegating tasks according to age, schedule, and personal giftedness, not gender. And they learned that family is a team effort—a team made up of males and females.

Rearing children and managing a household are two of the most demanding and rewarding jobs. It is a great privilege and a huge responsibility with far-reaching ramifica-



tions for our communities, our country, and the world. What goes on in our homes affects who our children are today and will continue to influence them and their children when we're gone. As we spend time with our children—encouraging them at the breakfast table before school, listening to the happenings of their day in the car on the way to soccer practice, praying with them as we tuck them in at night—we are teaching them who they are and preparing them for who they will become. We are training them in how to treat other human beings and the planet we live on, how to determine right and wrong, and how they can contribute to making the world a better place. We're showing them how to express love and affection, anger and frustration, and how to settle conflicts. And most important, we're teaching them God's guidelines for living. This is valuable work—no matter how many other full- or part-time jobs you have, whether you're paid in sticky kisses or company stock—and it should not be taken lightly, for our children's sake and the world's.

Don't get me wrong. I am not advocating that every woman who works in the marketplace should quit her job and come home. My list of the best mothers I know includes a business owner, a physician, an interior designer, and a congresswoman, as well as women who have chosen Family Management as their only full-time career. All these women live balanced lives, and their families take priority over their careers.

I also know full-time mothers who don't take their job seriously. They fritter away time watching television, shopping, and running up credit card bills. Discontented and bored with their lives, they have low self-esteem and remain dissatisfied much of the time—not a good place to be, no matter what your job.

Here's the bottom line: Family Management is serious business. Bringing up children is not only a great privilege but also a responsibility that we need to take as seriously as career success, because home is where success really matters. Whether we're changing a diaper or closing a deal, our work has dignity, honor, and value.

The family is a great invention. When it's working at its best, the family unit is a uniquely loving and supportive place.

"The homeliest tasks get beautified if loving hands do them."

—*Louisa May Alcott*

It's where unconditional love finds rich expression and produces lasting rewards. However, whether we're office managers,

Family Managers, or both, we are only human. We need help in balancing life's demands. We can't do everything by ourselves—and that's what family is about.

### **Who Is Your Family's Manager?**

When Bill and I married in 1971, we didn't have the options and opportunities of today's couples when it comes to pre-

marital classes, counseling, and temperament assessments that identify potential relational rocky spots. You can bypass a lot of heartache by asking questions and discussing important differences and definitions before you say “I do.” For example, how were disagreements settled in the home where you grew up? Did family members blow up or clam up? Who managed the household? What was your family’s definition of clean? Did your family eat dinner together? How did your parents handle money? Who always did what around the house? How did you celebrate holidays? Did you open presents on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning? Most people consider how their family of origin did things as “normal.” But if not discussed beforehand, when two views of normal meet on the business end of matrimony, trouble lurks just around the corner.

On our wedding day, Bill and I knew that we wanted to spend our lives together serving God and helping people—but we’d never discussed the nitty-gritty details of our homes. We had a rude awakening when Bill’s normal and my normal collided.

Bill came from a family in which his mother did everything, and I mean *everything*, for him and his dad. Naturally, Bill’s view of normal was a wife/mother who, in addition to her pastor’s wife duties, prepared a “country breakfast” every morning; took care of all the cleaning, laundry, errands, and shopping; and prepared a home-cooked meal every night. I came from a family in which everything was done for me as

well—but not by my mom. We had household help that took care of all the cleaning, laundry, and cooking.

Neither Bill nor I had any inclination or preconceived notions about doing housework. It had always been done for us. So naturally, Bill expected me to do it. And naturally, I had no intention of doing it—much less by myself. Talk about a culture clash!

But we were also products of the sixties—you know, civil rights, women’s liberation, and equal footing for all. So it made sense to us to put aside our views of “normal” and come up with a new definition. We decided that I would be our family’s manager, but we would begin our life together working as a team. Back then there were still plenty of traditionalists who wondered why in the world Bill should clean, cook, or do laundry since he was the husband. And when he became a father, they saw no need for him to learn how to change diapers or use a rectal thermometer. They thought that I, the wife and mother, would naturally assume most of the responsibilities for domestic chores and for the children in our young, growing family.

We came to the mutual conclusion that men are just as capable as women of mopping a floor and changing a diaper. We’re in this together, we reasoned, and if that means crossing some invisible but deeply drawn gender lines that say a woman does this and a man does that—which back then it really did—well, so be it.

We also believed (as we still do) that if Mom is a full-time Family Manager, then Dad is more than somebody who signs the checks and doles out praise or punishment at the end of the day. Bill wanted to be just as involved with our home and our children's lives as I was. We were naive, though, especially before we had our first child. Neither of us had a clue just how demanding a new baby can be, especially in the middle of the night. Since Bill had to get up early in the morning to drive across town for an 8 a.m. grad school class and then head straight to his part-time job (which paid the rent), it didn't seem fair that he should take equal turns at sleepless nights. That was when we reassessed equality.

As our egalitarian arrangement has devolved and then evolved over the last thirty-six years, Bill and I have made changes based on what

we want for our family and ourselves. Except for a brief part-time teach-

"One's best asset is a sympathetic spouse."

—*Euripides*

ing job and some entrepreneurial endeavors, during the first sixteen years of our marriage I chose to have only one full-time job as the Peel Family Manager—staying at home with our children and running our household. It made sense that I should bear most of the domestic responsibilities during the day since Bill had a full-time job outside the home. Then at night we shared the responsibilities—kids, dishes, baths, spelling words. As our boys grew and were able, they began

to help out as well. We wanted them to grow up understanding that being part of a family is a privilege, as well as a responsibility. But it was more than making sure they had regular chores to learn about responsibility. We wanted them to feel the pride of “ownership” and the independence of being able to, in part and according to their age, take care of their things and themselves. We also wanted our kids to grow up understanding that it’s okay for men and women to cross over traditional, invisible territorial boundaries. Nowhere that I know of is it written that Dad is the only one who understands finances and Mom is everyone’s live-in maid.

About the time I began writing and traveling around the country to speak, Bill started writing and speaking too, so our arrangement changed again. We regularly studied our calendars to make sure one parent was at home while the other one traveled. We divvied up household tasks according to our new schedule, and although we are hard-core do-it-yourselfers, we outsourced more jobs so that when we were home we’d have more time for family fun. Someone else could clean the carpets at this time in our lives.

No matter what your stage of family life or how you manage operations in your home right now, beginning to look at yourself as a Family Manager can mean a fundamental and dramatic shift in the way you view your work and its importance. Consider the following core principles of good Family Management as you embrace your valuable role.

## **Core Principles of Family Management**

- A household is an economic institution. Food preparation, child rearing, laundry services, housecleaning, transportation, care of the sick, the acquisition of goods and services (shopping), gardening and lawn care, home and car maintenance and repair, and financial accounting are all services typically produced in the home. Every home needs one individual who takes the leadership role for seeing that the home and all its operations run smoothly.
- Family Management is important work that millions of people do every day, whether or not they have another full-time or part-time job outside the home.
- The principles and strategies that successful business managers use will help the Family Manager create a smoothly running home. For example, just as in business, families need to know their mission and values, manage operations by department, practice delegation and team building, create standard operating procedures, do advance work, and build equity in relationships.
- Household tasks and responsibilities can be better managed when categorized into seven distinct departments and supervised accordingly:

*Home & Property*—overseeing the maintenance and care

of all your tangible assets, including your belongings, your house and its surroundings, and your vehicles

*Food*—meeting the daily food and nutritional needs of your family

*Family & Friends*—fulfilling relational responsibilities as a parent and spouse, and with extended family, friends, and neighbors

*Finances*—managing the budget, paying bills, saving, investing, and giving to charitable organizations

*Special Events*—planning and coordinating occasions—birthdays, holidays, vacations, garage sales, family reunions, and celebrations—that fall outside your normal routine

*Time & Scheduling*—managing the family calendar and daily schedule; dispatching the right people to the right place at the right time with the right equipment

*Self-Management*—caring for your body; improving your mind; nurturing your spirit

In chapter 3, I'll show you how to set specific goals for each of these seven key areas—diminishing the potential for becoming desperate in each one.

- Family is God's idea, and He knows best how to make it work. By putting God first and seeking His wisdom, you will become who you need to be for yourself and those you love, and a better manager of your home, family, and personal life.



The Family Manager system helps people like you and me save time, money, and energy. It helps us get organized; carry on traditions; and create a warm, welcoming home. But there's something more significant, beyond the strategies. One of the main benefits of saving time is having more time to spend in meaningful ways with the people we care about. We save money so we'll have it to spend on things like taking family trips, enhancing our lives, and giving to others. We save energy so we'll be awake to enjoy the finer moments of life—enjoying a night out with our spouse, reading a book to our child before bed, hosting friends for dinner. We become organized so we can reduce daily stress and enjoy the blessings of life. We carry on traditions that bond our generation with preceding and succeeding generations. We create a warm and welcoming home so that family members (including ourselves) and friends can enjoy a place of rest and refreshment from the stress-filled world.

“To be happy at home is the ultimate result of all ambition, the end to which every enterprise and labour tends.”

—*Samuel Johnson*

It is vitally important to me to help my family (and myself) become all we were created to be. I want to bring out the best in them and have them bring out the best in me. I want this for you and your family too. When we rightly understand our role and take this job seriously, the quality of our homes improves.

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# **The Family Manager Creed**

I oversee the most important organization in the world

Where hundreds of decisions are made daily

Where property and resources are managed

Where health and nutritional needs are determined

Where finances and futures are discussed and debated

Where projects are planned and events are arranged

Where transportation and scheduling are critical

Where teambuilding is a priority

Where careers begin and end

I am a Family Manager

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We are on the road to, as Samuel Johnson put it, “the ultimate result of all ambition.” I’m so glad you’ve decided to join me on this journey!

## Personal Reflection



Managing a family is a huge responsibility and a highly important position for which no one is fully qualified. There are days when the job can seem overwhelming. To dwell on how we have failed or worry about how we might fail in the future is never productive. Instead, I've found that it helps immensely to approach our job with relaxed confidence and take our cues from the One who wrote the job description in the first place. Then we have nothing to fear. Being a Family Manager becomes an incredible privilege and one of the greatest blessings of life, a gift from the Creator.

“God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7, KJV)

Ask God to give you courage, strength, love, and a sound mind to be the best Family Manager you can be.

## About the Author

Kathy Peel is called “America’s Family Manager” by journalists and millions of women. She is founder and CEO of Family Manager Network, Inc., a company that provides resources and Family Manager Makeover services through a national network of certified Family Manager Coaches.

She is AOL’s Family and Kids’ Coach and editor-at-large for Picket Fence Press, and she writes for many magazines.

Visit [www.familymanager.com](http://www.familymanager.com) to sign up for Kathy’s free newsletter, to learn about Family Manager coaching and makeovers, or to contact Kathy about speaking at an event.

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