

the busy couple's



GUIDE

to sharing the
work & the joy

AMERICA'S FAMILY MANAGER

kathy peel

with advice for men from Bill Peel



: PICKET
: FENCE
: PRESS

A FAMILY MANAGER RESOURCE

An Imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at www.tyndale.com.

www.familymanager.com

TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Picket Fence Press and the *Picket Fence Press* logo are trademarks of Family Manager Network, Inc.

The Busy Couple's Guide to Sharing the Work and the Joy

Cover photo of Kathy Peel copyright © 2009 by David Edmonson; photo of boy in bathtub copyright © by orkhanartstudio/iStockphoto; photo of couple painting and spine photograph of couple copyright © by iofoto/iStockphoto; photo of food © by jml5571/iStockphoto; photo of cleaning supplies © by Andyd/iStockphoto; photo of lawn mower © by terminator1/iStockphoto; photo of money © by Duckycards/iStockphoto; photo of soccer ball © by mammamaart/iStockphoto; photo of toothbrushes © robeo/iStockphoto. All rights reserved.

Interior image of wrench copyright © by Nishan Sothilingam/iStockphoto; image of people copyright © by Anna Kazantseva/iStockphoto; image of computer mouse copyright © by Zuki/iStockphoto. All rights reserved.

Designed by Julie Chen

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

The Internet addresses included in this book are offered as a resource to you. They are not intended to imply an endorsement on the part of Tyndale House Publishers, nor do we vouch for the content of these sites for the life of this book.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Peel, Kathy, date.

The busy couple's guide to sharing the work and the joy / Kathy Peel.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4143-1620-8 (sc)

1. Families—Time management. 2. Couples—Time management. I. Title.

HQ734.P374 2009

640'.43—dc22

2009032536

Printed in the United States of America

15 14 13 12 11 10 09

7 6 5 4 3 2 1



wish list

You want your home to be a refuge from the world, a haven for family and friends, a place everyone loves to gather and hates to leave. You want family relationships to flourish in a loving, nurturing environment. You want shared family experiences to build rich traditions and memories. The problem is, you can't make it happen on your own.

At times, do you wonder if your family is oblivious to your efforts—or maybe even trying to undermine them? Do you ever think:

I wish my family understood how much work it takes to manage our home.

I wish my spouse would get over the expectation of having a spotless home.

I wish my fiancé and I could begin marriage with a fair division of labor.

I wish my spouse would be more responsible about financial matters.

I wish I could enjoy the vacations I work so hard to plan and orchestrate.

I wish we had more alone time as a couple.

I wish we didn't argue over how and where we spend the holidays.

I wish I had more time for personal development.

I wish my family would be better about picking up after themselves.

I wish we didn't start off the day so stressed.

I wish dinnertime wasn't such a hassle.

I wish we had more fun as a family.

I wish we could stop fighting about money.

I wish my spouse would stop nagging me.

Good family management, like all good management, is about everyone in your home functioning as a team. This book will help you and your spouse join efforts to build a strong family and make your home a pleasant, refreshing place for everyone.

“Kathy has done it again! She’s packed a book with great solutions and strategies that busy moms can use every day to manage hectic households. The advice, insights, and tips are practical, easy to understand, and applicable to real family dynamics. These are solutions that will make a difference in my life.”

MARIA BAILEY

Host of *Mom Talk Radio*; creator of Smart Mom Solutions

“*The Busy Couple’s Guide to Sharing the Work and the Joy* is a guidebook based on a lifetime of working together. Kathy and Bill Peel lend their expertise to the pages of this book, providing insight on how to love and lead each other and your family as you live and work together. One of my favorite points in the book is the importance of giving our best, not our leftovers, to the family, the most important organization on the face of the earth.”

REPRESENTATIVE MARSHA BLACKBURN

(R-Tennessee)

“Whether you are a newlywed or have been married for years, this book will help fix and tighten the nuts and bolts of any family. In today’s hurried society where the most basic family tasks can get left behind or left to one person, Kathy Peel provides a well-structured, direct, and practical guide for those who want to develop their marriage and family into a team that enjoys a balanced household. From cleaning schedules to party planning, Peel provides research, wisdom, and insight that will help you manage your everyday household work so you can enjoy your family!”

DR. JOE WHITE

President, Kanakuk Kamps

“Kathy Peel does it again, with very detailed and practical insights into how men and women can better manage their households and their relationships in a time that looks to be more challenging than most would expect. There couldn’t be a better time to absorb the valuable advice in this book.”

HARRY S. DENT JR.

Author, *The Great Boom Ahead* (1993) and *The Great Depression Ahead* (2008)

“Kathy Peel expertly lays out everything couples need to know about working together, from managing a home and finances to creating family traditions and organizing mealtimes. Insightful and extremely comprehensive, this book is a necessary resource for couples at any stage of marriage. With tools to help you and your partner manage your household and divide tasks fairly, Peel will help you and your spouse tackle home, marriage, and family as a team.”

STACY DEBROFF

Founder and CEO of Mom Central, Inc., www.momcentral.com

“I work with many organizations to build winning teams, but when it comes to building a winning family team, I turn to Kathy Peel for advice. My wife and I have truly benefited from Kathy’s books, and we consider this timely book a must read for anyone who feels that busyness and stress are stealing their family’s joy. Thankfully Kathy gives us the tools to take on these challenges and create a strong, peaceful, and joyful family.”

JON GORDON

Best-selling author, *The Energy Bus* and *Training Camp*

“Kathy Peel’s newest book, *The Busy Couple’s Guide to Sharing the Work and the Joy*, should be required reading for every couple seeking to work together as a team, ‘moving from me to we’! As Kathy so ably describes, a great marriage takes a commitment to outgive the other person—out of love. Kathy, along with Bill’s complementary advice, teaches us how to live this out in our daily, complex lives. As ones who understand and minister to our nation’s military, we particularly recommend this great family management road map for each military family serving our nation in these challenging days.”

MAJOR GENERAL (R) AND MRS. BOB DEES

Campus Crusade Military Ministry

“When we moved to Texas over 30 years ago, Kathy Peel was one of the first people I met. I have treasured her friendship and wisdom about family life. I love how she and Bill have worked together as a team over the years to raise three wonderful young men. She took my advice years ago to stay out of the kitchen so she could spend time helping other families. Now, years later, she is the ‘master chef’ of family life. Follow her recipe and turn your family into a team and your home into a nurturing, refreshing place for all.”

JUDIE BYRD

Best-selling author, founder of Super Suppers, and host of *Judie Byrd’s Kitchen* on FamilyNet TV; www.judiebyrd.com

“As a family physician for nearly 30 years, I have too often seen the heartache that results from spouses who do not work together as a team. So if your marriage is feeling a little under the weather or you just want to practice good family health, go to bed with this book, read it, and study it with your spouse. It will do wonders for the health of your marriage and family.”

WALT LARIMORE, MD

Coauthor of *His Brain, Her Brain: How Divinely Designed Differences Can Strengthen Your Marriage*; www.DrWalt.com

“As the poster children for *Busy Couples*, my husband and I need this book. We work, travel, and raise our daughter together. Kathy’s book is a lifesaver and so easy to read. I love the quizzes and charts and margin notes. For a busy person like me who really doesn’t even have time to read, this book is something I can do in segments and then discuss with my husband. Kathy has an easy style of writing, and her own life experiences are totally relatable. This book is a must read for *every* busy couple!”

KERRI POMAROLLI

Actress, comedian, and author of *Guys Like Girls Named Jennie*

“Few guests on our radio show compel us to take out our pens and paper and write down every detail they discuss. Yet that is exactly what we do each time Kathy comes on the show. Just about every facet of our organized homes is from an idea or concept from one of Kathy’s brilliant books. This book helps us remember that each family must be a team. We must work together and share in the family responsibilities, but we must be very careful about not keeping score. This book should be included in the registry of every engaged couple and given to those fortunate enough to make it to an anniversary without it!”

MAURA RIDDER AND MAUREEN BROWN

Radio talk show hosts, *Mom’s the Word*, www.momsthewordshow.com

“No matter how good or bad your marriage is, real hope combined with a realistic plan of action to make things better is like a cool glass of water on a blistering hot day. *The Busy Couple’s Guide to Sharing the Work and the Joy* is the perfect cool glass of water your marriage needs!”

TOM ZIGLAR

CEO, Ziglar

“This is a timely book for busy parents. Our media reports the American family is in the throes of social breakdown. Others contend ‘family’ is a dying concept brought on by greater wealth, mobility, and distractions. ‘Not so quick,’ says Kathy Peel! As a parent of a ninth-grade actress and 16-year-old soccer jock and wife to a professional football husband, I am passionately determined to reclaim what society seeks to destroy. Kathy’s book is just the ammunition I need. When we establish our priorities through practical goal setting, managing the family together and parenting as a team, we can experience the joy of a vibrant marriage and the potential of a purposeful and fun family life.”

SUSAN REINFELDT

President and founder, Liv2Giv Foundation

“Running a family is hard work and can be a lonely, thankless job. If the hamster wheel of daily chores (cooking, cleaning, laundry, carting around kids, etc.) is zapping the joy from your life, put out the welcome mat for Kathy Peel! Her wisdom, wit, and fresh insights will calm your nerves and inspire you. Sprinkled throughout the book is the male point of view, provided courtesy of Bill Peel. His insights lend wonderful perspective and will give you new appreciation for the burdens carried by the other half. Don’t go another day without reading *The Busy Couple’s Guide to Sharing the Work and the Joy*.”

ANN MATTURRO GAULT

Freelance writer for many national magazines and Web sites; contributor to *Unbuttoned: Women Open Up about the Pleasures, Pains and Politics of Breastfeeding*

“I have known Kathy and Bill Peel for decades and can attest that they, a very busy couple themselves, practice what they preach. This excellent book is chock-full of practical advice born of living busy lives, working and raising three children. Written in an accessible, easy-to-apply format, this advice will change your routines, get you out of your frenzy, and give you a new sense of peace and control over your schedule and your stuff. A must for all busy couples!”

AUTUMN DAWN GALBREATH, MD, MBA

Clinic Medical Director, Texas MedClinic, San Antonio, Texas

“Marriage is hard work, but Kathy provides simple tips to help manage your marriage. It’s taken me almost nine years to figure out what Kathy has put together in this book. I wish I’d had this when I first got married. Now the trick is to get my husband to read it!”

MARIE LEBARON

Stay-at-home mom of three; creator and owner of www.makeandtakes.com

“Military couples are expected to accomplish the mission of family management under a variety of stressors: frequent moves, a deployed spouse, and innumerable volunteer roles. *Busy Couples* is an important tool that will help military couples find a balance and routine to overcome the everyday conflicts, which, in Kathy Peel’s words, ‘pave the way for a joyless existence,’ empowering us to face military-specific challenges with new joy for our military adventure.”

TARA CROOKS AND STAR HENDERSON

Cofounders, ArmyWifeNetwork.com

“If you think your marriage is going to be perfect, you’re probably still at your reception. No marriage is perfect, but you can have an almost perfect one if you’ll follow the practical and fun tips in this book. Kathy Peel, along with her husband, Bill, has created a great resource for couples who want to help their marriages not only survive but thrive. Whether you’ve been married one year or 50, get this book!”

MARTHA BOLTON

Emmy-nominated writer; author of over 50 books, including *Didn’t My Skin Used to Fit?* and *Cooking with Hot Flashes*

“Every working couple can begin to transfer the organizational ‘best practices’ of the workplace to their home community, finding a lot of love and peace in their own crafted new normal. And Bill Peel’s added perspective will resonate with men who value a peaceful and organized home. Kathy, you give us hope—men and women *can* know success in managing their work and home lives!”

MELINDA SCHMIDT

Host, *Midday Connection*, Moody Radio



dedication

*To Donald and Barbara Hodel,
who have been a wonderful example to Bill and me of what
it means for a husband and wife to love each other through
the years, for better and for worse, in sickness and in health.
Don, who served as Secretary of Energy and Secretary of the
Interior under President Reagan, says he and Barbara have had
a long-standing disagreement over who deserves the majority of
the credit for such a splendid relationship. He is convinced it is
she. She is convinced it is he. Their commitment to outgive each
other is surely one reason why their marriage is worth emulating.*

contents

Note: The titles of forms and worksheets are in italics.

Introduction:

Getting from Me to We xv

Why 50-50 Won't Work xvii

How to Make This Book Your Own xix

ONE

The Business of Doing Family I

Weekly Hit List 4 • When Life Gets Out of Balance 6 • A Man's Point of View 9 • Increasing Your Chances for Success 12 • *His Normal/Her Normal* 13 • *Couple's Communication Covenant* 14 • *Assess Your Stress* 14 • Clarify Your Priorities and Goals 15 • Tackle Tasks as a Team 15 • The Real Business of Family 17 • The Most Important Things to Remember 19

TWO

Managing Your Time and Schedule 21

Time Management Myths 22 • Preparing for Extra-Busy Times 24 • Time Management Truths 24 • Time Robbers 26 • *Identifying Time Robbers* 28 • Take Control of Technology 29 • Tips to Tame Technology at Home 29 • A Man's Point of View 31 • Say Yes to What Matters Most 33 • *His Normal/Her Normal* 34 • The Most Important Things to Remember 37 • *Assess Your Stress* 38 • *Clarify Your Priorities and Goals* 39 • *Tackle Tasks as a Team* 40

THREE

Managing Your Home and Property 41

Warning: Housekeeping Opposites Attract 42 • Don't Drown in Your Own Clutter 44 • Pressure Points and Stress Relief 46 • A Man's Point of View 49 • Create User-Friendly Rooms 50 • *His Normal/Her Normal* 52 • The Truth about Clutter and Cleaning 54 • The Most Important Things to Remember 55 • *Assess Your Stress* 56 • *Clarify Your Priorities and Goals* 57 • *Tackle Tasks as a Team* 58

FOUR

Managing Menus and Meals 59

Culinary Teamwork 60 • A Man's Point of View 61 • A Case for Family Dinnertime 63 • *His Normal/Her Normal* 67 • Nutrition 101 67 • Going to Extremes Can Backfire 68 • Preparation Preempts Problems 69 • *Meal Planning* 70 • Spending Less on Food 71 • Make Couponing a Family Affair 71 • *Weekly Meal Planner* 72 • More Ways to Save at the Grocery Store 73 • Saving on Food in Your Own Backyard 74 • How Dinnertime Almost Destroyed a Marriage 74 • The Most Important Things to Remember 76 • *Assess Your Stress* 77 • *Clarify Your Priorities and Goals* 78 • *Tackle Tasks as a Team* 79

FIVE

Managing Relationships with Family and Friends 81

Relationships Trump Everything 81 • Heed the Warning, Lose the Guilt 83 • A Man's Point of View 84 • Intimacy: The Key to a Strong Marriage 87 • Mental Intimacy 88 • Emotional Intimacy 88 • *His Normal/Her Normal* 89 • *Relationship Time and Commitment Inventory* 90 • Physical Intimacy 92 • *Weekly Quality Time Planner* 93 • Spiritual Intimacy 94 • *Building Intimacy: A Couple's Questionnaire* 97 • Parenting as a Team 98 • *Child Development Goals* 99 • Ideas for Quality Time with Your Kids 101 • Learning from Each Other 105 • Staying Connected to Friends 106 • The Most Important Things to Remember 109 • *Assess Your Stress* 110 • *Clarify Your Priorities and Goals* 111 • *Tackle Tasks as a Team* 112

SIX

Managing Your Finances 113

The Danger of Unsettled Values 113 • What Does Money Mean to You? 115 • Your Family Financial Policy 116 • Low-Cost Family Fun 119 • Seven Financial Mistakes to Avoid 120 • *Finding Ways to*

Save 123 • A Man's Point of View 126 • *His Normal/Her Normal* 129
• Counting the Cost of Going Back to Work 130 • Hanging Together in
Tough Times 131 • Surviving and Thriving through the Really Tough
Times 134 • Working through Financial Hardship 136 • The Most
Important Things to Remember 138 • *Assess Your Stress* 139 • *Clarify
Your Priorities and Goals* 140 • *Tackle Tasks as a Team* 141

SEVEN

Managing Special Events 143

Who's Your Chief Celebration Officer? 143 • Avoiding Toxic
Extremes 144 • A Man's Point of View 146 • Simple Celebrations,
Treasured Traditions 149 • A Dozen Ways to Celebrate Every Day 150
• *His Normal/Her Normal* 151 • *What Will Your Children Remember?* 152
• Cost-Saving Vacations 154 • *Road Trip Planner* 155 • The Most
Important Things to Remember 158 • *Assess Your Stress* 159 • *Clarify
Your Priorities and Goals* 160 • *Tackle Tasks as a Team* 161

EIGHT

Managing Yourself 163

Say Good-Bye to Mommy Guilt 164 • Self-Care Is Not Gender
Specific 165 • Adding Energy to Your Life 166 • Habit Breakers—
Habit Makers 168 • Finding Time for Self-Care 169 • *Determine
Who You Will Become* 171 • A Man's Point of View 172 • Signs of
Burnout 174 • *His Normal/Her Normal* 175 • The Most Important
Things to Remember 180 • *Assess Your Stress* 181 • *Clarify Your
Priorities and Goals* 182

NINE

Family Team-Building Workshop 183

Pulling Off Your Workshop 188 • Topics for Change 188 • *Launching
Routines (Standard Operating Procedures)* 191 • Workshop Logistics 192
• SWOT for Success 193 • Workshop Follow-Through 195 • Family
Workshop Planning Guide 198

Web Resources 205

Notes 215

Index 217

Acknowledgments 221

About Kathy Peel 223

introduction: getting from me to we

Here's a multipart question:

- Given the unsettled expectations of men and women . . .
- Given women's earning power and many men's desire to be with their children more . . .
- Given that an anemic national economy and a shrinking workforce are pushing Americans toward home for support and strength through unity . . .
- And given that a man and woman make a marriage covenant before God to stick with it till the end . . .

How does a couple set up to “do” family right? How do two people from two different family cultures—two different definitions of what is “normal”—forge a new and third family culture that works in good times and bad, that binds them together, and that eventually sends out their offspring as fully functioning adults? How does a man or woman go from a life of “what I like and want” to “what’s best for everyone”? How do two independent people who want a healthy and interdependent family segue from 18 to 35 years of “me” to the rest of their lifetimes as a well-functioning “we”?

An estimated 2.2 million couples hope to figure that out this year. They’ll walk down the aisle to what they hope is happily ever after—and spend a lot of money to get there. In 2008 the wedding industry reported revenues that exceeded—brace yourself if you have a daughter—*\$50 billion*.

Plenty of planning and partying takes place before the big day—not to mention acquiring enough gifts to stock a small

department store. Equipped with matching linens and the latest kitchen gear, couples feel poised to take on the world together. Nowadays, many couples wisely invest time and money in premarital counseling. Some take compatibility tests that point out possible areas of friction—he's an introvert, she's an extrovert; he's pragmatic, she's intuitive.

Yet despite known differences, noteworthy divorce rates, and warnings from unhappily married bloggers, all newlyweds tell each other, "We're different . . . our love is stronger. Together we can overcome any adversity!"

Couples simply don't stand at the altar and think, *Our marriage will fail*. Nope, they're thinking happily ever after.

But before long, the different preferences they each brought to the relationship begin to grate on their nerves. Conflicts arise over how, why, and when to do certain things—habits they've never noticed, routines they'd rather not give up. Although they may have found enough common ground on the big issues—faith, shared interests, life goals—to want to spend the rest of their lives together, the list of potential irritations two people bring into marriage could fill a good-size book. Yet most couples don't question or discuss the little things beforehand—and it's the little things that can eat away at a relationship bit by bit.

Before marriage, couples rarely consider . . .

- how they will each react if their mate leaves dirty dishes in the sink or throws clothes on a chair;
- how they will record shared and separate events—on a calendar, synced smartphones, or the refrigerator door;
- who will shop for groceries and prepare meals;
- who will take the recycling bin to the curb;
- who will be responsible for changing the cat litter or making kennel reservations for the dog;
- how they will decide which charities and organizations to support—and how much;
- how they will divide time among circles of friends—friends from before they were a couple, friends from after they became a couple, friends from work and the neighborhood.

So much of life involves routine matters such as these.

Then add a child or two to the mix. Who will cover 3:00 a.m.

feedings, pediatrician appointments, caregiver interviews, play-dates, preschool research, car pool pickup, and mounds of extra laundry? Potential for conflict is compounded. Unresolved routine matters can reduce romance, hinder camaraderie, become fodder for resentment, and pave the way for joyless coexistence.

It doesn't have to come to this.

As I travel and speak about Family Manager strategies that mitigate conflict and advance harmony, I meet countless couples determined to “do” family right. Many of them grew up as latchkey kids or in baby boomer families that imploded. Now that they are parents themselves, they want better—for their kids and themselves—and they've committed to working together to make it happen. My husband, Bill, and I are committed to helping them.

why 50-50 won't work

One summer morning in 2008 our determination escalated as I read an article from the *New York Times Magazine* aloud to Bill. The story was about a likable upstate couple, Marc and Amy, who are living examples of an emerging marriage model that aims to split work and home life straight down the middle. Writer Lisa Belkin explained the couple's goal this way:

They would work equal hours, spend equal time with their children, take equal responsibility for their home. Neither would be the keeper of the mental to-do lists; neither of their careers would take precedence. Both would be equally likely to plan a birthday party or know that the car needs oil or miss work for a sick child or remember (without prompting) to stop at the store for diapers and milk.¹

After finishing the article, some readers probably released a sigh and said to themselves, *Way to go, Marc and Amy—it's not easy, but it's finally fair.* No more of everything falling on one person! No, sir: every responsibility comes in equal halves. She washes colored clothes; he does the whites. One night she puts the kids to bed; the next night he does. Both have part-time

workweeks. When sick kids have to stay home from school, both parents are on standby.

I penned a response to the article, but what I really wanted to do was hop on a plane to New York and give this couple a big hug and an A for effort because they are doing a lot of things right. They discuss important topics like child-rearing standards, scheduling details, and housecleaning preferences. Both value their home life, support one another, and participate actively as parents.

While I applaud their commitment to manage their family well, experience tells me they're on a dangerous path, headed for disappointment. And I don't write that lightly. Bill and I had this kind of determination when we married in the 1970s. Zealous to do family well, yet absent mentors or books on comanagement, over time we cobbled a family model from the best of what we knew: the Bible and the business world. As our home-management guidelines started to gel, our partnership evolved into a Family Manager mind-set.

Thirty-eight years of marriage, three kids, and a career in researching and writing about family management have convinced me that, day to day, an equal split will never be equal. A perfect balance of responsibilities and workload is unachievable—in reality and in both partners' perception of reality. We all overestimate our contribution: if we're doing 50 percent, we think we're doing 60 percent. Plus, a 50-50 management plan promotes legalistic score keeping and relationship dynamics that threaten to divide the family we're working so hard to protect.

In the *New York Times Magazine* article, Belkin rolled out some unhappy statistics: When both marriage partners have full-time jobs, the wife does nearly twice the housework. In middle-class homes, no matter who drives off to work, the wife also does the majority of cooking, cleaning, yard work, repairs—and child care.

Marc and Amy wanted to buck the stats, and that makes good sense. Growing up, Amy had watched her widowed mother work full time—both on the job and at home. Later she saw her working girlfriends take on pretty much the same schedule. Before she married Marc, Amy had been looking for a man willing to jettison the way it's always been done to aim for equality and fairness.

Finding a way to share life's work (and joys) as committed partners and teammates—getting from “me” to “we”—is a

critical issue with which every husband and wife must grapple. In the shadow of this couple's admirable desire to create a fair and equitable division of labor, as well as thousands of other couples who are searching for a way to do the same, I hope you will see in this book that marriage is much more than a you-do-your-half-I-do-mine proposition.

A great marriage takes a commitment to outgive the other person, to do more than one's fair share—out of love, not obligation. A great marriage is made up of two people who treat one another as valued partners, who willingly pitch in, and who regularly forgive one another for being imperfect. How can you create this kind of relationship? That's what you will learn on these pages. You'll discover that in good family management, 50-50 is not the gold standard and good intentions are not good enough. If an equal division of labor were doable, husbands could carry their unborn baby for 4.5 months. If good intentions were the key, prospects for a lasting marriage would be better than 50-50, which is about what we're looking at now.

how to make this book your own

This book grew out of a desire to equip busy couples with the proven strategies and practical tools that continue to help Bill and me enjoy a vibrant marriage and strong relationships with our three grown sons and two daughters-in-law. Each chapter offers opportunities for you to personalize what you read and apply the ideas in your home in ways that make sense for your family.

If possible, work through the book with your spouse. In each chapter, Bill weighs in on issues from a man's point of view. Thought-triggering worksheets will help you and your mate communicate individual desires and frustrations, then negotiate realistic expectations and workable plans.

You can read the book straight through, or if you feel particularly stressed about one area—finances, for example—you could read chapter 1, "The Business of Doing Family," then jump right into chapter 6, "Managing Your Finances." You can work through the other chapters on a felt-need basis. And be sure to

check out the list of Web resources on page 205 to fortify your relationship.

Although you will benefit from reading this book by itself, it is meant to be a companion to *The Busy Mom's Guide to a Happy, Organized Home*, which contains hundreds of nuts-and-bolts solutions for running every department of a home. The book you've got in your hands will show you how to work together as a team to implement those solutions, which will foster a loving, nurturing family culture and a smoothly running home.

But I must warn you:

1. *Don't try to make too many changes at once!* You might begin with one or two areas of your home or responsibilities, like laundry or food preparation, and branch out from there.
2. *Agree to be honest and loving about disagreements you may have about your expectations.* Let's say your mother-in-law kept a hospital-clean home so your husband thinks the kitchen should be cleaned three times a day. You, on the other hand, see the need for only one daily cleaning. Helpful worksheets will help you talk out issues such as this and negotiate a compromise you both can live with.

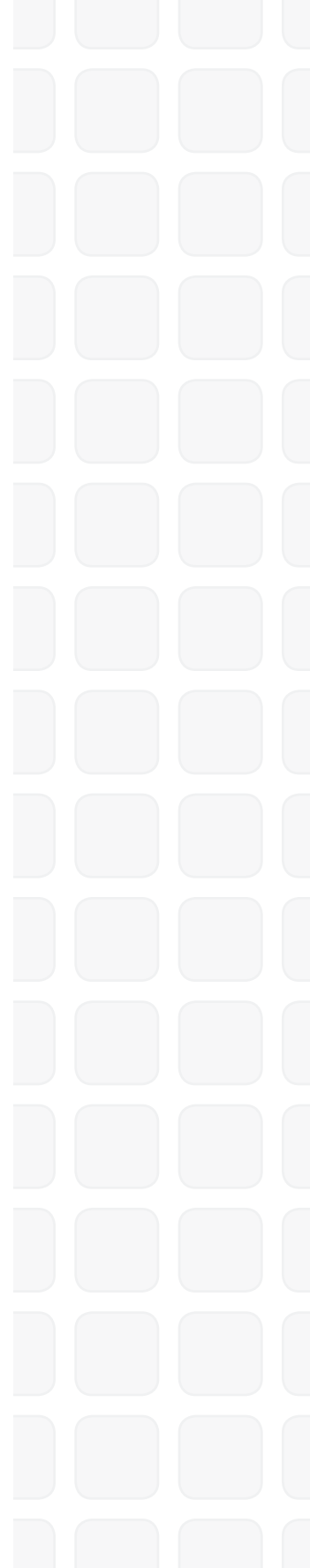
A strong family doesn't just happen. It's the result of a passionate commitment to shared values, family members who work as if they're on the same team (because they are), and partners who invest their love, time, and energy into building equity in one another.

Every family is flawed, but done well, family says, "I love you no matter what." Done well, family fosters a healthy love of self and others, brings out the best in every person, and advances each individual member's success. Done well, family helps members discover their God-given giftedness and learn how to share those gifts and skills with the world.

Family is a safe place to learn hard truths. It's the sacred ground for training and passing on values, customs, and traditions. It shapes our inner life and our outer citizenship. Family hands us the first chapters of our story, helps us define our roles, and prepares us to write the rest.

I'm so happy you've picked up this book; Bill and I can't wait for you to realize the benefits of doing family well, reaping dividends that will multiply across generations. Whether you've been married a few months or many years, it's never too late to begin making changes that lead to a rewarding marriage, a strong family, and a more satisfying life.

Please keep reading. A lot is at stake.



one: the business of doing family

If you've read any of my previous books, you know that the Family Manager system turns on sound business principles. Every family is an organization, and every organization needs a manager. Most often it's the mother; sometimes it's the dad. In every case, the partner who answers the high call is no autocrat. To the contrary, he or she leads by serving. He or she shares responsibility and helps individual members identify and develop their gifts and talents. In our family, Bill and I are peers and colleagues, committed to a single mission, matching values, and building equity in the Peel Family Organization. The years have shown us that the dozens of roles and tasks that constitute a household all fall into one of seven departments. (See sidebar on page 2.) Applying business strategies—such as team building, delegating, and increasing productivity—promotes efficient management of each department.

Although business strategies work wonders when it comes to the business of running a home, many people make the mistake of viewing marriage as a business transaction, a common practice in cultures throughout history. Monarchies have long used marriage as a tool to strengthen alliances and treasuries. Across centuries and cultures, women have entered marriages with dowries—money, jewels, real estate—and as part of a package deal. Take the biblical account in Genesis 24, for example. Abraham sent a servant to trade a number of expensive gifts for a wife for his son.

It would seem that we've come a long way since the days when women were treated like a commodity. The trouble is . . . now men and women both are viewed as a commodity: "He got a bargain," we say, or "She's back on the market" or "He married above his pay



GOOD TO KNOW

Being married is associated with higher self-esteem, greater life satisfaction, greater happiness, and less distress, according to the Institute for the Social Sciences at Cornell University.



FROM THE HEART

Marriage is not just about physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy. It's also about three meals a day, sharing the workload, and remembering to take out the trash.

The Seven Family Manager Departments

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

Home and Property—overseeing the maintenance and care of all your tangible assets, including your belongings, your house and its surroundings, and your vehicles

Menus and Meals—meeting the daily food and nutritional needs of your family

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

Finances—managing the budget, bill paying, saving, investing, and charitable giving

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

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

grade.” Both partners weigh what they believe to be their contribution to the relationship against what they expect to get. Then when they marry and learn that they didn’t get as good of a deal as they anticipated, they often withhold and withdraw. “He’s not doing his fair share, so I’m not going to do mine.” Or “She’s not giving me what I want, so I’m going to withhold what she wants.” Relationships that operate on bargaining terms are time bombs ticking toward self-destruction.

Although the business transaction concept doesn’t translate well into family life, many other business practices do. Strategies like knowing your mission, casting vision, and creating standard operating procedures are key to building a strong family and a happy, organized home. Creating a positive “corporate culture” is important too.

Every organization, be it a small business, a nonprofit organization, a Fortune 500 company, or a family, has a corporate culture—an environment that either promotes or discourages qualities like productivity, loyalty, and score keeping. Publicly held companies typically place a lot of value on pleasing shareholders, so everything revolves around profit and the bottom line. In other words,

there's lots of score keeping. This type of working environment often produces employees who feel as though they're treated like a commodity, and they often adopt a bargaining mentality: *If you don't value me, I won't value you.* Complaining and blaming become the norm. Productivity declines, company loyalty dwindles, and achieving revenue projections becomes more difficult.

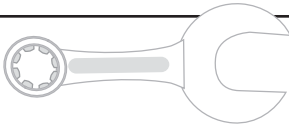
At least one public company does things differently. Southwest



CAUTION!

“Whenever the tissue of life is woven of legalistic relations, there is an atmosphere of moral mediocrity, paralyzing man’s noblest impulses.”

—Alexander Solzhenitsyn



QUICK FIX

QUESTION: *My husband and I are both so busy that normally when we need something done, we just leave notes for one another. For instance, in the morning he might leave me a note asking me to take his shirts to the dry cleaner; meanwhile, I make up a list during the week of all the minor repairs I need him to complete on Saturday. It may be an efficient way to communicate, but occasionally one of us gets annoyed that the other just expects something to be done. How do you recommend that couples like us communicate about household issues?*

ANSWER: Use a Weekly Hit List (see page 4) to specify tasks according to the seven departments. On Sunday night discuss and list tasks you both would like to see accomplished over the next week. To designate who will be responsible for each task, use different color highlighter pens or put your initials beside each item on the list. Add items with deadlines to your electronic calendar and post the hard copy in a central location to serve as an additional reminder.

Airlines puts its employees—they're called “family”—at the top. One of their mantras is, “Happy employees make happy customers who make happy shareholders.” Interestingly, Southwest is the only domestic airline to show a profit every year since 1972, one year after its inception. Recently I heard Dave Ridley, senior vice president of marketing and revenue management at Southwest, give a few examples of what it looks like behind the scenes when a company values its employees—putting “family” first.

He told of the gate attendant working at the New Orleans airport



FamilyManager™ WEEKLY HIT LIST DATE:

TIME & SCHEDULING	HOME & PROPERTY	MENUS & MEALS	FAMILY & FRIENDS
MONDAY			
TUESDAY			
WEDNESDAY	FINANCES	SPECIAL EVENTS	SELF-MANAGEMENT
THURSDAY			
FRIDAY			
SATURDAY/SUNDAY			
NOTES			

during Mardi Gras who would not allow an inebriated man to board a plane. Angry because he missed his flight, the man wrote a letter of complaint to Southwest's customer relations department. After investigating the situation, Southwest responded by backing up the gate agent's decision and writing a letter to the man requesting that he take his travel business elsewhere.

In another instance, a passenger left her Bible in the seat pocket of a plane that landed in Kansas City. When a flight attendant found it, she took it upon herself to track down the passenger and mail the Bible (at her own expense) to the passenger.

During the summer of 2008, Hurricane Ike blew the Texas coast apart and crippled city infrastructure, bringing Houston and surrounding communities to a halt. When airports in Houston were finally able to reopen, Southwest told its Houston-based employees to stay home and put their homes and lives back together—a project that took weeks. To fill their vacant positions, hundreds of SWA employees from all over the country volunteered to fly to Houston to cover for their fellow Southwest teammates.²

So why did Southwest side with the gate agent and lose a paying customer? Why did the flight attendant go above and beyond her job responsibilities? Why did Southwest employees go the extra mile and choose to do more than their fair share to help out coworkers in Houston? It's because the Southwest Airlines culture is centered on its people first—before shareholders and paying customers.

This type of corporate culture doesn't just—*poof!*—happen. It is championed by company leaders who live out attitudes and actions like these as they go about their business. Day in and day out they practice servant leadership, creating an environment that positively influenced the attitudes and actions of employees. Most Southwest employees don't feel like commodities. They know they are loved, respected, and supported by company leaders. The result: Southwest has become legendary for its customer service and the way team members serve each other. Should it be any different in a family? Obviously not.

Southwest doesn't believe in corporate "big shots." Inverting the usual management pyramid, their managers are trained to serve those who report to them.



SMART MOVE

At least once a day, catch family members doing something *right*. Add energy to your home and relationships with praise and appreciation.



FROM THE HEART

Take some time to consider what family members are catching from you.



CAUTION!

Household chores are a major source of conflict for couples, not because of the actual tasks but because of their underlying meaning, according to the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver. If one partner feels he or she is putting in more effort around the house, it brings up notions that the other person does not respect him or her enough to carry an equal load.

when life gets out of balance

Likewise, there are no big shots in a family. Everyone should feel loved, respected, and supported. Household operations should be supervised in a way that considers each family member's gifts, limitations, and proclivities, with everyone working together to create an environment that encourages members to identify and pursue their God-given callings. Jobs in a home should not be delegated according to gender or divided into an exact 50-50 split; this leads to mutual policing as much as it solves family needs. The scales of responsibility never fully balance in any family; to expect that they will only seeds resentment. Situations pop up and push one parent or another to double up here or back off there. If Mom is an accountant, Dad's domestic duties spike during tax season. Should work pull Dad out of town, Mom adapts her schedule to meet the kids' needs. And then there's serious illness.

Tyra Damm of Frisco, Texas, is the mom of Cooper, eight, and Katie, four. When she and her husband, Steve, both worked full time—Tyra at the *Dallas Morning News* and Steve at Children's Medical Center in Dallas—the Damms also split grocery shopping, bill paying, cooking, cleaning, and laundry duties. They didn't split things 50-50; they divvied up tasks according to available time and personal proclivities. When Cooper was born, Tyra adjusted her business hours for mornings at home. Steve picked up Cooper from day care and was the primary parent until Tyra got home at night. Following Katie's birth, Tyra quit full-time employment to freelance and increased her household duties. Still, when Steve walked in the door at night, he also jumped right into the chores, whether cleaning the kitchen, bathing the kids, or reading books at bedtime.

Family balance shifted overnight for the Damms when doctors diagnosed Steve's brain cancer, a grade-four tumor that hurtled him into a risky biopsy and six weeks of concurrent radiation and chemotherapy. Initially he responded well, but the treatment damaged his vision and weakened his left side so he could no longer drive (or carpool the kids to soccer practice or preschool). While the Damms once enjoyed a fluid division of labor, Tyra now ran all seven departments. Sadly, Steve passed away in September 2009. Throughout their ordeal, Tyra never wondered whether Steve would get well and

compensate her for the months of imbalance. She knew that healthy families don't keep score.

What about your home? Is it a positive place to do the work of being a family? Does the environment promote going above and beyond to serve one another? What about loyalty? Do you stick up for each other in good times and bad?

Corporate culture is difficult to define because it's intangible. It's the collective state of mind of people who work at a company, so it means something different in every company. But the businesses that win a place on the various lists of Best Places to Work embrace some common "best practices" for creating a positive working environment. Consider these examples and how they can be adapted in the home.

Company strategy: On a regular basis, have lunch or coffee with randomly chosen employees and really listen to their concerns and suggestions.

At home: Make sure your spouse and children know you care about their opinions. Carve out time regularly to listen attentively to their concerns and suggestions.

Company strategy: Make sure employees have clearly defined goals, understand their professional growth path in the company, and have the tools and training they need to succeed.

At home: Make sure family members understand family goals for household tasks they are responsible for. Provide the training and tools they need to succeed.

Company strategy: Recognize and reward employees for creative solutions and doing good work.

At home: Look for ways to encourage and reward family members for exhibiting a cooperative attitude and doing tasks well.

Company strategy: Check out your own behavior. Are you the kind of person you'd like to work with? If you aren't, then hone your attitude, keep your promises, and be less critical.

At home: Ditto. Enough said.

As it does in a company, a home's working environment trickles down from its leaders—what they value, how and what they



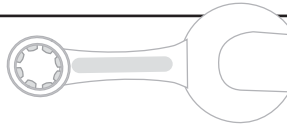
GOOD TO KNOW

Having a husband creates an extra seven hours a week of housework for a woman, according to a study by the University of Michigan. A wife saves a man from about an hour of housework a week.



TECH TIP

Create a private Twitter account between you and your spouse. Since Twitter messages are limited to 140 characters, you can't carry on significant communication, but quick Tweets such as "Thinking of you—hope your meeting goes well" or "Pasta for dinner—then a walk?" Or "Rendezvous after kids in bed?" can keep your hearts and minds connected.



QUICK FIX

QUESTION: *Since we married last year, my spouse and I seem to lock heads over how to do most things—both big and small. For instance, he's a neat freak who gets annoyed if I leave a pair of shoes in the living room. I think that's no big deal compared to his habit of coming home late from work without bothering to call me to let me know. On one hand, so many of our fights seem to start over relatively minor issues that I wonder if they even matter; on the other, these disagreements are really taking a toll on our marriage.*

ANSWER: You're right—many arguments that seem petty can damage the trust and camaraderie between a couple. However, they can also be the starting point of great conversations about what should be the "new normal" for your family. Each of you brought habits, preferences, and traditions from your growing-up years—most of which you view as the normal way to do things—into your marriage. Like every couple, from the newly engaged to those married for decades, you need to launch a discussion about what will be normal in your family. Somewhere between perfection and chaos, between your definition of normal and your partner's, you need to find common ground. Smooth functioning of your home and the quality of your relationship depend on this. The His Normal–Her Normal worksheets can help you communicate your individual views and desires and then negotiate your way to expectations you can both live with. (Note: A His Normal–Her Normal worksheet is included in each chapter of this book.)

communicate, and how they exhibit loyalty. A couple's attitudes and actions affect everyone who lives in their home.

This means, for example, that if building your career and making money are what you value most, relationships will suffer. If you are not willing to negotiate your standards, or if

you habitually criticize, speak disrespectfully, or point out your spouse's or children's mistakes to others, you can expect similar attitudes and actions from them and a home that's a miserable place for all. No one in his or her right mind sets a goal to create such a negative environment. But it happens every day. And it could happen in your home before you even realize what has happened. None of us is exempt.



a man's point of view

family communication

Fifteen years ago Kathy and I decided to share home office space. It made sense—on paper. We would be in the same place at the same time when projects called for joint input. We could work more as a team on parenting and income-earning responsibilities. When one of us was traveling or pushing to meet a deadline, the other could cover parenting responsibilities and household tasks. Like I said, the plan looked good on paper.

Reality was a different story. Loving words and feelings morphed into heavy sighs and puckered brows. Before sharing the same space, we had both become accustomed to a quiet atmosphere when working. Now we had to listen to each other's phone calls, frustrated self-talk, and exasperated computer abuse when technology rebelled. We expected each other to know when we needed silence. I expected Kathy to cheer me up when I was stressed. She expected me to understand the importance of ambience; she wants her office to be colorful, creative, and "cute." This proved difficult since my side of the room usually looked like the aftermath of an explosion. Even worse, she expected me to drop everything to help her solve problems, and truthfully, I expected her to do the same for me. It wasn't long before the question arose: can a loving, understanding couple turn into monsters that devour themselves and their young?

The answer is probably yes. On some days if one of



GOOD TO KNOW

The Pew Research Center reports that Americans believe a happy marriage requires (in order): faithfulness, a happy sexual relationship, the sharing of household chores, adequate income, and good housing.



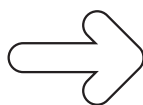
FROM THE HEART

The ability to defer to another person is not instinctive. Only God can help you do the impossible.

our unsuspecting offspring had wandered into the office and asked a simple question like “What’s for dinner?” one of us might have snapped his head off. As tension grew palpably, one thing became clear: we needed to make some changes, because working together wasn’t working.

Here we were: two reasonably sane people with at least average intelligence who understood the benefits of healthy communication and had established boundaries about how we would communicate in the rest of our life together, but who had not stopped to hammer out the details about working in the same office. After our epiphany, we carved out some time to discuss our preferences and frustrations, and negotiate our way to expectations we both could live with. We also prayed for patience and the ability to remember that our highest calling as husband and wife is to help each other do the will of God—which sometimes means dropping everything to change an ink cartridge so handouts can get printed for a speech Kathy’s giving. Today, except when we’re in meetings or traveling separately, Kathy and I work together most of the time, helping each other with individual and joint projects—and we actually enjoy it. The days when a monster rears its head are few and far between.

No matter how much time you and your wife spend together, shared expectations and a vibrant relationship depend on setting up and then meeting communication guidelines. When a husband and wife understand how the other is wired, when they honor one another’s uniqueness, and when they know that they’re on the same team and committed to each other’s success, their entire family can thrive.



HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Find some time when you and your mate can have an uninterrupted, focused conversation. (If you have small children, you may have to leave the house to make this

happen. A weekend retreat is ideal.) Use the His Normal–Her Normal worksheet on page 13 to share and record when and how you learned what you consider to be normal ways of communicating. Talk about what you want your family’s new normal to be.

Then get more specific. Ask each other the questions below. As you do, talk about how certain words, tones of voice, and actions make you feel. When appropriate, ask for forgiveness and graciously give it.

1. What are the little things I say that bother you the most? What makes you angry?
2. What ways do I communicate with you that make you feel appreciated? unappreciated? important to me? not important?
3. When is the easiest time to talk to me? the most difficult?
4. How can I show you more love and/or respect in the way I communicate?
5. Are there things you want to hear from me that I am not saying?
6. What is the most refreshing way I communicate? What is the most draining way I communicate?
7. What do you wish I would share with you that I have not been willing to talk about?
8. When is the best time and what is the best way to approach you about something that is bothering me? the worst time and way?
9. Do you ever feel dismissed by me when you are trying to say something important? How can I respond more positively?
10. What kind of words, gestures, or body language do I use that you would rather I delete from my vocabulary and actions?



CAUTION!

The brain is capable of thinking at a rate of 800 words per minute, making it easy for moments of stress to explode into lingering years of conflict because of an unguarded word spoken out of irritation. Remember the German proverb: Words are like bullets; if they escape, you can't catch them again.

Once you've finished discussing these questions, agree not to bring up old wounds again. Negotiate some mutually agreed-upon guidelines for how you will and won't communicate with each other. Create your own Communication Covenant on page 14 to make your guidelines "official." This will promote faster change and serve as a check when you slip back into old patterns every now and then.

increasing your chances for success

Bill and I meet a lot of people whose dreams for a vibrant marriage and happy home have gotten buried in the clutter and confusion of everyday life. They are good people. Smart people. Husbands and wives who are faithfully trying to run their households, nurture their children, care for their own parents, earn a living, and pay the bills. Yet when they stop long enough to consider where all their busyness is taking them, they feel frustrated—sometimes even desperate. They wonder how they will ever take charge of life instead of allowing life to charge right over them.

If you can relate, take heart, because things *can* change. But before change can happen, you and your spouse need to know *what* you want to change, and *how* and *when* you're going to do it. This book will help you partner in every area of your home and family life to bring about the changes you want to make.

Chapters 2 through 8 contain a wealth of practical ways to help you make positive changes in each department of your home. As you read, choose some of the strategies and tips that make sense for the age, stage, and makeup of your family. Then try a few of the suggestions. Planning and communication tools will help you personalize the ideas and pave the way to a vibrant partnership.

The ACT (Assess-Clarify-Tackle) process will help you and your spouse identify your stress points, priorities, and desires for each department, and then guide you to sensible ways to divvy up tasks and responsibilities between the two of you and your children, one department at a time. It will lead you—and this is very important—not to *my* strategies for running your household, but to *yours*.

To give you a better idea of what I'm talking about, here's a sample of the ACT process in the Home and Property department.



HIS NORMAL—HER NORMAL



family communication

Consider the conflicts between you and your spouse that stem from the different ways you learned to communicate in your families growing up. Discuss assumptions that you both brought into your marriage about “normal” ways couples communicate. Listen and learn from each other, then negotiate your way to your “new normal” for your relationship. (See examples below.)

His Normal

Everyone freely expressed emotions at our house. I always knew when someone was upset with me and vice versa. We had it out and parted friends. I think holding back your feelings is harmful and destructive.

Our New Normal

We will not repress anger and frustration, but we will be careful how we speak to each other. We will speak respectfully, taking into consideration the other person’s feelings and how what we say might be perceived.

Her Normal

Anger was never expressed at our house, so I feel demeaned when you raise your voice and look angry. I believe that outbursts of anger are wrong and hurtful.

His Normal

Our New Normal

Her Normal



FROM THE HEART

“Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee, and just as hard to sleep after.”

—Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Couple's Communication Covenant

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

assess your stress

Stress is your reaction to the small irritations, annoying situations, or big catastrophes in life. Negative stressors rob you of joy and energy. Over time they may harm your health. They can also ravage relationships you hold dear.

Identifying your own sources of stress is important—as is understanding your spouse's sources of stress. The first step to effecting change in the Home and Property department is for each of you to rank your stress about specific household jobs and areas of your home, and evaluate your overall stress in the department. (You will do this by marking the Home and Property stress assessment on page 56.)

clarify your priorities and goals

Before you begin dealing with the stress producers in the Home and Property department, you need to know what's most important to you and your mate, and keep those priorities front and center in your mind. If you don't, you will end up living by other people's priorities, a sure path to frustration. While you and your spouse may want your home to be reasonably clean and tidy, your standards may not measure up to your best friend's—and that's okay.

Once you determine what's most important to you, the next step is to craft an overall statement that describes your Home and Property desires and goals, which should reflect your priorities. Having a vision of how your home would look and operate if this department were running at peak efficiency is key to making positive change. Keep in mind: if you aim at nothing, there's a good chance you'll hit it. The Clarify Your Priorities and Goals worksheet on page 57 will enable you to filter out the competing voices of your extended family, your friends, and our culture as a whole; determine what you and your spouse deem most important; and establish your overall desire for the Home and Property department.

tackle tasks as a team

After you assess and clarify, it's time to discuss how you and your spouse will divvy up Home and Property department chores between the two of you, and delegate chores to children who are old enough to help out.

The Who's Responsible for What? worksheet on page 58 makes this process much simpler, enabling you to assign responsibility for recurring household chores and list additional tasks specific to your family.

The amount of participation you can expect from family members will depend on their ages, abilities, and interests. Talk with your children about jobs that need to be done and those that might be delegated to them. And keep in mind that for delegation to work, you need to be clear about what you want done. Be sure to define job specifications in ways everyone can understand. For example, taking out the garbage also includes wiping out the bottom of the trash can, if necessary, and replacing the trash bag.



CAUTION!

If you, like many busy couples, are convinced that you can't slow down long enough to think about family priorities and goals because so many things are screaming for your attention *right now*, you're asking for trouble. A long date or weekend away to discuss these important topics will pay huge dividends.



SMART MOVE

Any employee of online auctioneer eBay can nominate another for an “Out of This World” award for outstanding performance. Talk about how you might adapt this practice as a family.

Some tasks may also need deadlines for when the job should be accomplished.

As you begin to implement change, remember that any team—at home as well as at the office—will accept change better if they are:

- involved in the process
- asked to contribute their feelings, opinions, and suggestions
- told the reasons for and advantages of a given change
- respected for their feelings, even though they may oppose the change
- given appropriate and deserved recognition for their contributions in implementing the change

Team building is an ongoing process. It is not an end unto itself. It's not something you do once and it's done forever. In order for it to be successful, it has to be tweaked, updated, or changed as needed.

For the first few weeks after you've begun to work more as a team, schedule a regular weekly time, perhaps a Sunday afternoon, to get feedback and discuss how your division of labor is working. To give structure to the discussion, you might ask family members to assess their assigned tasks using these criteria:

- time of day the task was accomplished
- length of time it took to complete the task
- level of difficulty or complexity
- quality and thoroughness of work
- availability of tools or equipment needed to do the job
- necessary cooperation from other family members in order to complete the task

Listen carefully to your spouse's comments and children's input. Do you sense that you are moving toward your goals and living more in line with your priorities in this department? Encourage suggestions for improvement, and make any necessary adjustments or changes. Show appreciation for progress (even if it's small). Sometimes it is appropriate to reward completion of tasks in age-appropriate ways.

Whatever your stress level and starting point, implementing the ACT process will provide you with a personalized path for change in each department of your home.

the real business of family

Do you feel like you're drowning, barely able to keep your head above water, wondering if you've got the wherewithal to even read another page in this book? If so, may I gently but firmly remind you (as a friend would) of a truth that you cannot escape: you can choose *hard* or *harder*. Here's what I mean.

There's simply no getting around it: at times, life is hard—for every single person. Even for your coworker whose lavish lifestyle you secretly envy. Even for your friend who weighs less and looks better than she did before she had children. Even for your neighbor whose husband must have some type of super-spouse gene that yours seems to be missing. No one, I repeat, *no one* has a perfect life. There's no such thing this side of heaven.

That said, please remember this: although it's not perfect, life can be good. *Really good*. It all depends on your choices—what you allow to define your life and how you choose to respond to problems and pain. There are many circumstances in life that don't give you a choice, but there are plenty in which you do have a choice—though at times it may not feel that way.

I sure don't want life to be harder, and I doubt you do either. But if you find yourself thinking, *Change is just too hard*. . . . *I don't think it's worth the effort*, please don't give up! If you do, you could very well be choosing the path to harder, more painful circumstances.

I hope you can go through this book as a couple or join a study group of like-minded folks who want to strengthen their marriages and make positive changes in their homes. Or you may launch a study group yourself with other couples or friends. Even if you have to work through the book on your own, it will be worth every ounce of effort you can muster.

Another option you may want to consider is working with a certified Family Manager Coach who has been trained to help people and families—just like you and yours—implement the ideas and strategies that will help you build a strong family and create a happy, organized home.³ One husband and wife who did this put it this way: “Working with a Family Manager Coach helped us turn the corner and was a lot cheaper than a therapist!”

Sadly, many frustrated couples head straight for an attorney's office to file for divorce. This is a very costly decision and can



GOOD TO KNOW

Every family hits glitches that hurl good intentions into chaos. Getting off track doesn't mean you've failed. It just means you need to make some course corrections.



CAUTION!

If you are in a situation that you feel requires professional help, don't wait to reach out. Seek immediate help if violence, drugs, alcohol abuse, or severe depression are involved. Many counselors, physicians, hotlines, law enforcement officials, and support groups have expertise in the problem you are dealing with. Not sure where to start? Pick up the phone and call a church for resources.



FROM THE HEART

Ask God to give you the courage to make positive changes in your home and marriage.

Draw on His promise: “Be strong and courageous!

Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

make life much harder in many ways. Whether the waves are just beginning to surge or you feel like you're close to going under, I encourage you to reach out and grab a life ring.

Throughout history, the closer that men and women lived to a subsistence level, the more they needed each other. It took everyone in a family working together to make it. Any force that threatened a family's stability also threatened its survival. Likewise, in early America, large family units were key to survival on the frontier.

The economic forces that threaten families today are different. We don't all have to labor together on the farm. But we still need to work together, helping each other survive and thrive. When one person is trying to get a new business going, his or her spouse and the kids who are old enough can offer tangible help and emotional support. When one partner (or both) loses a job, they can brainstorm about new jobs, help each other update résumés, offer network contacts, cover the home front while one of them retools skills or acquires more education, or help make space to launch a home-based business. When a family becomes cash strapped for any reason, they can lift one another's spirits by exhibiting a can-do attitude and focusing on the blessings of life instead of the problems they're facing. They can also keep discovering new and better ways to communicate and show their love in the context of a new challenge. They can get better at negotiating personal preferences and redefining mutual standards when things change. They can commit to working and pulling together for a lifetime because they are family.

While you're reading all the ideas for effecting positive change in your home, keep in mind that every family is unique. You will want to try some of the strategies in this book immediately. You'll want to tweak others to your particular situation. You'll want to skip or postpone other ideas—at least for the time being.

Whatever the age or stage of your marriage and family, the chapters that follow will help you develop your family's own “best practices” as you work together to get the seven departments in your home running smoothly and create an environment where you all can say, “Wow, it's good to be home!”

THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. A strong family doesn't just happen. It results from a passionate commitment to shared values and from family members who invest their love, time, and energy into building equity in one another.
2. Family is the sacred ground for training and for passing on values, customs, and traditions.
3. A family is an organization, and every organization needs a manager—someone with a team mentality who oversees home operations.
4. Applying business strategies—such as vision casting, team building, delegating, and leading by serving—promotes healthy relationships and efficient home management.
5. The dozens of roles and tasks that constitute a household fall into one of seven departments. Managing these areas accordingly promotes smooth operations and increased productivity.
6. Perfect balance of responsibilities and workload is unachievable in reality and in both partners' perception of reality; if you or your spouse is doing 50 percent, you'll think you're doing 60 percent.
7. Just as in business, every family hits glitches. Getting off track doesn't mean you've failed. It just means you need to make some course corrections.
8. If you and your spouse openly communicate about your family's priorities, as well as your individual preferences and proclivities, you'll be better equipped to make decisions all day, every day.
9. It's never too late to begin making changes that lead to a rewarding marriage, a strong family, and a more satisfying life.
10. Lean on God. He created the family and will give you the wisdom and strength you need to manage your household well.

web resources for couples

These sites were last accessed in June 2009. While each contains helpful information, inclusion does not imply endorsement by the author or publisher of all the content on the Web sites.

couples resources/help

<http://www.familylife.com>

FamilyLife provides a wealth of information on marriage and family life, including help for sensitive issues such as infidelity.

<http://www.marriagetoday.org>

MarriageToday, founded by Jimmy and Karen Evans, offers articles geared for couples in many situations, from those considering marriage to those contemplating divorce. It also offers a magazine that can be viewed online.

http://www.nationalmarriage.com/marriage_counseling.asp

The National Institute of Marriage has intensive marriage counseling programs for struggling couples.

couples retreats/conferences

http://www.drgaryandbarb.com/home/the_great_marriage_experience.php

Dr. Gary and Barb Rosberg provide The Great Marriage Experience conference as well as materials specifically for military marriages (available under the “Group Involvement” tab).

<http://www.familylife.com>

FamilyLife offers the popular Weekend to Remember marriage conferences across the nation. Visit this site for information and other helpful resources.

<http://www.garychapman.org>

Dr. Gary Chapman presents the Toward a Growing Marriage conference in various locations across the country. Check this Web site for a current schedule.

<http://www.intensives.com>

The Hideaway is nestled at the rim of the Palo Duro Canyon near Amarillo, Texas. It includes beautiful scenery, great meals, and intensive sessions with professional marriage counselors.

<http://www.marriagebuilders.com>

Marriage Builders, founded by Dr. Willard F. Harley Jr., author of the best seller *His Needs, Her Needs*, offers the Marriage Builders Online Program; the *His Needs, Her Needs* study course; telephone coaching; and many articles by Dr. Harley.

http://www.nationalmarriage.com/marriage_conference.asp

The National Institute of Marriage offers The DNA of Relationships for Couples, a marriage conference that helps couples on their journey to a great marriage.

education and the arts

<http://www.earlychildhood.com>

Early Childhood is a resource for teachers and parents of children up to eight years old. It includes activities, articles, and crafts, as well as online radio interviews with education professionals.

<http://www.eduhound.com>

Eduhound provides a database of Web sites for “everything for education K–12,” as the site states. They have tracked down information for everything you could imagine.

index

A

- ACT process
 - Family and Friends 110–112
 - Finances 139–141
 - Home and Property 56–58
 - Menus and Meals 77–79
 - overview 12–16
 - Self-Management 181–182
 - Special Events 159–161
 - Time and Scheduling 38–40
- allowances
 - children's 82

B

- balance 22
 - family 6
- burnout 174–179

C

- Child Development Goals* 99

children

- chores and 47, 186
 - goals for 98–99
- clutter control 44–46, 48
- Couple's Communication Covenant 12, 14
- communication
 - guidelines 10
- computer
 - online cautions 102
 - setting limits 29–30
- contentment 114–115, 135
- Control Central 45
- Couple's Questionnaire* 97
- coupons 71–73
- credit cards 121, 122
- Creed
 - Family Manager 81

D

- Daily Hit List 25
- decision making 171
- delegation 15–16, 184–188
- departments
 - Family Manager 2–3

*Determine Who You Will
Become* 171
dinnertime
beginning family dinners
66–67
importance of 63–66

E

employment
at home 130–131, 133
counting the cost of
130–131
envelope method 121

F

Facebook 102
Family Manager
Coaches 17
family outings 119–120,
125
family traditions
149–154
family workshop 183–204
agenda 188–192
benefits 185–188
logistics 192–193
finances
children and 125–126
fears 134–137
giving 135
low-cost family fun
119–120, 125
mistakes to avoid
120–126
philosophy 115–119
saving 122
teens and 132
working moms and
130–131, 133
financial hardship 136–137

Finding Ways to Save 123
freezer meals 60
friendships
staying connected 107
with other couples
107–108

G

groceries, saving on
71–74
guilt 164

H

His Normal–Her Normal
Family Communication
13
Family and Friends 89
Finances 129
Home and Property 52
Menus and Meals 64
Self-Management 175
Special Events 151
Time and Scheduling 34
holiday stress 143–146
housekeeping
hours spent by men and
women 163
standards 41–44

I

Identifying Time Robbers
28

L

listening to your spouse
91–92

M

Man's Point of View
Family Communication
9–12

Family and Friends 84–87
 Finances 126–128
 Home and Property 49–50
 Menus and Meals 61–63
 Self-Management 172–174
 Special Events 146–149
 Time and Scheduling 31–33
 marriage
 financial difficulties and 136–137
 maintaining intimacy 87–98
 new normal 8
 talking about finances 115–119
Meal Planning 70
 mealtimes
 dividing responsibilities 60
 good nutrition and 67
 importance for family 63–67
 medical claims 124
 mommy guilt 164
 mornings 170
 Most Important Things to Remember
 Family 19
 Family and Friends 109
 Finances 138
 Home and Property 55
 Menus and Meals 76
 Self-Management 180
 Special Events 158
 Time and Scheduling 37

N

nutrition guidelines 67

P

parental control software 102
 parenting 98–106
 activities with kids 101–105
 teenagers 104–106, 132
 priorities 25, 84

R

Relationship Time and Commitment Inventory 90
 resentment between spouses 8
 rewards for kids 189
 rhythms of life 22–23
Road Trip Planner 155
 room setup 50–54

S

saving
 on entertainment 119–120, 125
 on groceries 71–74
 on household expenses 131–134
 self-awareness 176–179
 self-care ideas 167–168, 172
 shopping, grocery 71–73
 sleep 21
 snack ideas 68, 69
 special events
 low-cost celebrations 150–153
 spiritual intimacy 94–95

standard operating
procedures 43, 191
stress
preparing for 24
SWOT Analysis 193–194,
203

T

team building 15–16,
183–188, 195–197
benefits 184
workshop 183–204
technology
during vacation 153
setting limits 30–31
teenagers
listening to 105–106
spending time with
104–105
teaching about finances
132
time management 24–36
time robbers 26–29
TV 30

V

vacations 154–157
volunteering 145

W

Web resources
couples resources/help
205
couples retreats/
conferences 205–206
education and the arts
206–207

family connections
208–209
family health 209
financial health 210–211
parenting 211–213
special focus 214

Weekly Hit List 3–4

Weekly Meal Planner 72

*Weekly Quality Time
Planner* 93

worksheets

Child Development

Goals 99

Couple's Communication

Covenant 14

Couple's Questionnaire

97

Determine Who You Will

Become 171

Finding Ways to Save

123

Identifying Time Robbers

28

Relationship Time and

Commitment

Inventory 90

Road Trip Planner 155

Standard Operating

Procedures 191

Weekly Hit List 4

Weekly Meal Planner

72

Weekly Quality Time

Planner 93

workshop, family 183,

204

acknowledgments

Just as teamwork is critical to a family's success, it is critical to a book's success.

I count myself blessed to work with the wonderful team at Tyndale House: Mark Taylor, Doug Knox, Jan Long Harris, Kim Miller, Yolanda Sidney, Sarah Atkinson, Stephanie Voiland, Maggie Rowe, Mike Morrison, and Sharon Leavitt. Thank you all for your support, encouragement, and commitment to excellence.

Heartfelt thanks also go to two amazing women: Tyra Damm, for her editorial input (always outstanding, not to mention prompt) and for allowing me to use her family's story; and Nancy Lovell, a gifted wordsmith who can bring energy to the weariest of sentences. Their talent and expertise take my writing to the next level.

about kathy peel

Kathy Peel is called America's Family Manager by the media and millions of moms. She is the author of 21 books (over 2 million sold), including *Desperate Households* and *The Busy Mom's Guide to a Happy, Organized Home*, 2009 winner of the Mom's Choice Award for Best Family and Parenting Resource and a 2009 National Association of Parenting Publications honoree.

She is the founder and CEO of Family Manager. Her company equips and encourages women worldwide to build strong families and happy, organized homes (www.familymanager.com). She writes a weekly Family Manager blog for AOL's ParentDish, is AOL's Kids and Family Coach, and serves on the board of experts for *Parenting* magazine and InternetSafety.com. She writes a monthly column in *HomeLife* and is a regular contributor to *American Profile*. Her articles and tips have appeared in numerous publications, including *Real Simple*, *First for Women*, *Family Circle*, *Reader's Digest*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Redbook*.

Kathy is frequently interviewed on TV and radio programs and has made repeat appearances on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *The Early Show*, *The Today Show*, CNN, HGTV, *The 700 Club*, *Focus on the Family*, Moody Radio's *Midday Connection*, and *Janet Parshall's America*. She is also a popular speaker at women's events, corporate programs, and church retreats.