

There Is More Than One Side Of The Retirement Picture

by John Bergman

You think men have a tough time adapting to retirement, how about their working wives?

Especially if (1) the wives had spent a lot of years clawing their way up someone's organization ladder, and (2) if their husbands had settled into a cozy retirement before they did.

These working women not only have to cope with a husband who is already comfortably settled into retirement life, but also to giving up their careers and staying home all day.

Now, you ladies out there, I would appreciate your not questioning my judgment in saying that there is a difference between a situation in which a man retires to his stay-at-home wife and a woman who does the same thing to her stay-at-home husband.

Anyway, I know a couple of cases in which the man took over most of the household chores and settled back to wait for his wife to retire. Now that they have both retired, they seem to be getting along alright, but who knows what goes on behind closed doors? I see the scenario something like this.

It is the first day of HER retirement, the morning after an evening of substantial revelry at her Company Retirement Dinner.

The menu was heavy beef, because that's what big executives eat. One after another, Ms. Big Shot's colleagues approached the rostrum, paying effusive tribute to her substantial contributions to the progress of the Company.

Toasts were drunk to her wonderfulness. She received an expensive gift, emblazoned with a discreet plaque to remind her that it was from the Company. She had never felt so important. Her husband was there, of course. He smiled a lot and sat quietly in his corner.

But now it is the first day of her new life and, as is her custom, she is up before first light, ready to accomplish. Husband is not ready for his day to begin. "For goodness sakes, woman," he says, "the morning shows don't even come on for another hour."

"Never mind, funny face," she coos at him, "Up and at 'em,

now that I have joined you in retirement, I want to become part of your life, to do what you do." He groans.

"Tell me," she asks him, as any good executive would, "what will your biggest decision be today?"

Whether to keep using my present dishwasher detergent or switch to Brand X."

Better try again, she thinks. She continues, "I want to be all the help I can to you in our new life. I want to change your life for the better."

"Whatever you say," he agrees.

"Surely, there is more to your retirement than shopping, cooking and cleaning. You can always hire someone to take care of those petty little household duties."

He sees his cozy retirement going down the tubes.

"Beginning right this morning, I will reorganize your life into meaningful segments, melding your household responsibilities and your leisure activities into a more workable pattern."

He left home.

She was astonished. What went wrong, she wondered. Surely it could not have been my reorganization plan, which was based on sound management logic.

No, there was nothing wrong with her reorganization plan. But I can tell her the difference between men and women in this kind of situation. You would never find a man trying to impose any of his ideas on the retirement schedule of his wife.

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