

Lawyer-Spouse?

By David W. Van Meter, Jami Fenner and the Honorable Vicki Robertson of the Work/Life Balance Committee

Marriage is hard enough, but for two lawyers to be married to each other, and live together harmoniously, that might seem that much more difficult. For the husband/wife team to also work together it might seem impossible. With the foundation of a good relationship and good work/life balance, it is not only possible but it is enjoyable. Respect plays as much a role as love does.

In marriage the dynamics of the individuals are constantly balanced. The dynamics of the needs of each gender must also be constantly balanced. That men and women are different is an understatement. Dr. Emerson Eggerichs says it best in his book, *Love & Respect*, “wives need love and husbands need respect.” We seem to gravitate naturally to this fact. Women naturally love and want to feel love; men naturally respect and want to feel respected. When these needs are met both are happy. If not, the balance is off.

Eggerichs describes that “when a wife feels unloved, she has a natural tendency to react in ways that feel disrespectful to her husband. When a husband feels disrespected, he has a natural tendency to react in ways that feel unloving to his wife.” With those moments of discord, a wife’s usual approach is to complain or criticize in order to motivate her husband to become more loving. The wife’s dislike is interpreted by the husband as disrespect and even contempt. A husband’s usual approach is to get angry or not talk in order to motivate his wife to become more respectful. The husband’s dislike is interpreted by the wife as unloving.

Thus the Crazy Cycle starts: he reacts without love, she reacts without respect, and around and around. To stay out of the Crazy Cycle or to end it once it starts, Eggerichs says, “The key to creating fond feelings of love in a husband toward his wife is through showing him unconditional respect.” Likewise, the key to creating fond feelings of respect in a wife toward her husband is through showing her unconditional love.

You can imagine how marriage alone is enough of a balancing act. Throw in the highly motivated personalities that typically make up lawyers and there are even more balls to juggle. It is easy to imagine that lawyer couples working together compounds the act by adding spinning plates. Love and respect definitely play a serious role. Consider the marriages of the following fellow lawyers, and the wonderful example they give us to true work/life balance.

Interview of Mark and Margo Brown

By David W. Van Meter

The law office of Brown & Brown, P.C., in Oklahoma City consists of two attorneys related by marriage; that is, they are married to each other and practice together. If you can’t imagine practicing with your spouse, let the Brown’s story show you how their positive dynamics allow them to work happily ever after.

Mark became an attorney in 1981, met Margo while she was a law student, decided to marry but vowed never to practice together. Margo became an attorney in 1986, and as life tends to present unexpected circumstances, began working in the large firm where Mark practiced, although on the opposite end of the building. To avoid difficulties that might arise relationally while working together, they recognized the need for and maintained a buffer space in the office so they were not around each other every minute of the day.

The time came in 1999 when Mark had two trials back to back and needed assistance. No one was available but Margo, so she helped. They worked well together, the clients liked it and so did they, and they have worked together ever since. They opened their combined practice and became Brown & Brown in 2002, and now practice at 6303 N. Portland, Suite 300. Both do litigation that includes plaintiff work, but is mostly defense in Product Liability, Construction law, Oil



Mark and Margo Brown.

Field law, Environmental and Rivers law (Riparian Rights).

Mark and Margo have grown into nat-

urally dividing their work load, with Margo doing most of the legal writing and appellate work, and Mark doing most of the depositions and witness preparations. However, trials are attended by both, as are most hearings.

The wisdom underlying the Browns’ combined practice is that each case always has two attorneys considering the evidence, and both male and female perspectives are applied. They also have the advantage of perceived balance by the jury because both a male and a female attorney are presenting their sides of the case.

Margo says their success in working together is because she treats Mark at the office the way she treated the partners in the other firms she was associated with. Mark says a mindset shift to a professional role showing professional respect as co-employees is necessary because they don’t stop being husband and wife when they walk through the office doors. Both agree respect is key. They appreciate the balance between their differing sets of skills, which complement each other and their practice as a whole.

In addition to their law practice, both Browns teach at UCO one night a week: Mark teaches Constitutional law (and Political Film once a year), and Margo teaches Introduction to Law. Margo is also an Administrative Law Judge. Mark and Margo are really good about leaving “work” at the office, but invariably some thought about a case will emerge into conversations at home, like, “If we develop this evidence . . . what do you think?”

Mark’s and Margo’s personalities mesh well together generally, which helps with their working relationship. Of course, the fact that Margo’s parents operated Miller’s Sporting Goods together from 1960 to 1988 may have also helped, by giving Margo role models to follow. Add Mark’s friendly nature and they truly do work happily ever after. Besides, Mark brings his “partner” a fresh cup of coffee every morning when they get to the office. As stated earlier, respect is key.

Interview of Robert and Courtney Powell

By Jami Fenner

Like many couples who are both lawyers, Courtney and Robert Powell met in law school. They were in the same section at OCU School of law. Each vividly remembers the other being called on in their torts class by Professor McDougal, although in Robert’s case, it was the first day of class. So, that event was a little unforgettable for Robert and those who felt his pain, such as Courtney.

Although that memory still may seem fresh, much has happened for the two of them since that first year of law school. They married on August 3, 2002, after graduating from law school. Each entered private practice, although most similarities end there. Courtney is with the Edmond firm of Lester, Loving & Davies, P.C., and her primary practice area is employment law and other types of civil litigation. Robert is with the Oklahoma

City firm of Pierce Couch Hendrickson Baysinger & Green, LLP, and concentrates his practice in the area of workers’ compensation law. When asked whether they “talk shop” at home, one said “yes” and the other said “no,” which likely indicates their work-related conversations are limited to sharing successes and frustrations with work, as many couples do, whether or not they happen to be lawyers.

Given they have a son, Jack, who now occupies much of their time, it is likely most of their conversations center around him. Jack was born March 15, 2007, (as Robert said, “beware the Ides of March”). Since that time, there have been many adjustments for Robert and Courtney; it has been challenging to find balance between work and family, especially since neither has family who lives in the Oklahoma City area. Certainly, they have shared in the child care duties. After Courtney returned from maternity leave, Robert took Jack to the office for a couple months. Wouldn’t it be nice if more lawyer-fathers had that choice? Of course, there are still many sacrifices both must make, such as staying up later, getting up earlier and little time for hobbies, but they agree it is worth it.

Living with another lawyer presents unique challenges, especially when both lawyers are advocates or litigators, such as Robert and Courtney. On the other hand, each agrees the other truly understands deadlines and the need for billable hours. Robert and Courtney have a great attitude about the challenges of being married to another lawyer and an appreciation for the advantages it brings.

Interview of Gregg and Joan Renegar

By the Honorable Vicki Robertson

After 35 years of marriage, 2 children, and the last 11 years practicing law together, Joan and Gregg Renegar both agree that practicing law together has been the best part of their respective legal careers (each greater than 30 years).

Prior to 11 years ago, Joan had not been working for 12 years, as she was staying at home raising their 2 sons. After Joan re-entered the work force by conducting legal research at home, Gregg persuaded her to join his law firm. Joan practices employment law while Gregg primarily does oil and gas work (including class action litigation). Even though their areas of practice are decidedly diverse, they each act as 2nd chair for each other’s cases.

Both admit that they have very different approaches to litigation. Even though they office together, they rarely ride to work with each other and may not even see each other all day long while at the office. While they enjoy practicing law together, their outside interests are extremely different: Joan enjoys cooking, interior decorating, and gardening; Gregg is a car and motorcycle guy.

The Renegar’s agree that the primary attributes for successfully practicing law together are patience and respect.