

Designing a Dual-Career Marriage Seminar

The problems of dual career marriages are business as well as personal issues. Managers who are trained to assist individuals will also be giving valuable help to their organizations.

By RICHARD P. LONG

A quick scan of *Working Woman*, *Ms.* and *Parents* reveals an increase in articles on the dual-career marriage. A similar glance at *Business Week*, *Forbes* and *Fortune* will not reveal this theme. Dual-career marriage can be found as a workshop topic for women's business associations and human resource support organizations, such as the NTL Institute, but there are no corporate training programs in dual-career marriage. Therein lies the problem. Dual-career marriage issues are seen as personal problems, not business problems.

What exactly is a dual-career marriage? It is one in which both the husband and wife pursue careers and maintain a family life together. The word "career," as used here, refers to a job that requires a high degree of commitment and a continuous developmental life, including extensive education, preparation and moving from one level to another to achieve expertise and responsibility.¹

According to Peter Drucker, the purpose of business is "to create a customer."² To fulfill that purpose, business separates rather than integrates its people with its business. As Rosabeth Kanter, author of *The Change Masters*, points out, segmentation "makes it harder for business to move beyond its existing capacity in order to in-

novate and improve."³ Business is more likely to innovate and improve if managers understand dual-career marriage issues. How so? By working through them they can learn how to integrate their people into their business.

How many innovative ideas go to the competition because dual-career couples go to the competition? How many bright, talented people leave to join successful companies because in addition to their other qualities, these companies manage rather than avoid the concerns of dual-career marriages?⁴

Labor force trends provide another reason to think seriously about providing managers with a dual-career marriage seminar. Nearly one of every two women now works outside the home. The absolute number of working women will more than triple and rise to 66 percent by 1990. Nearly 60 percent of all working women are married and have working spouses. Statistics show that of all families in the United States with incomes of \$22,000 or more, representing the top 20 percent of all families, more than half (54 percent) have dual careers.⁵

According to a study issued by Catalyst, a New York resource center for business women, 80 percent of 374 top companies surveyed in 1981 believed that men increasingly feel the need to share parental responsibilities. Yet 37 percent admitted that there are certain positions in their corporations that cannot be attained by men who try to combine their careers with parenthood. The survey also found that companies do recognize that two-career family problems may harm production, morale, recruiting and ultimately profits.⁶

This all points to an inescapable line of reasoning. The shift in the labor force calls for a shift in the content of management training. Managers who adjust to the change will be more effective than managers who do not. One way to address this need is to offer a seminar on the dual-career marriage. Here is our experience in conducting such seminars.

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Managers attending a half-day seminar learn how to: identify the issues in dual-career marriages; recognize the need to balance career and family/marriage demands; help dual career couples resolve career and family concerns; and define the organization's role in assisting dual-career marriages.

Preparation points managers in the right direction before they attend the seminar. If they are readers, *The Two-Career Couple* is an excellent starting point (Francine S. Hall and Douglas T. Hall, *The Two-Career Couple*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishers Company, 1979). If, on the other hand, they are nonreaders, a two-page monograph, entitled *Career and Family: The Organization's Role*, gets their attention (single copies of "Focus On..." are available from The Levinson Institute, Inc., Box 95, Cambridge, MA 02138, 617/489-3040). It is important to establish

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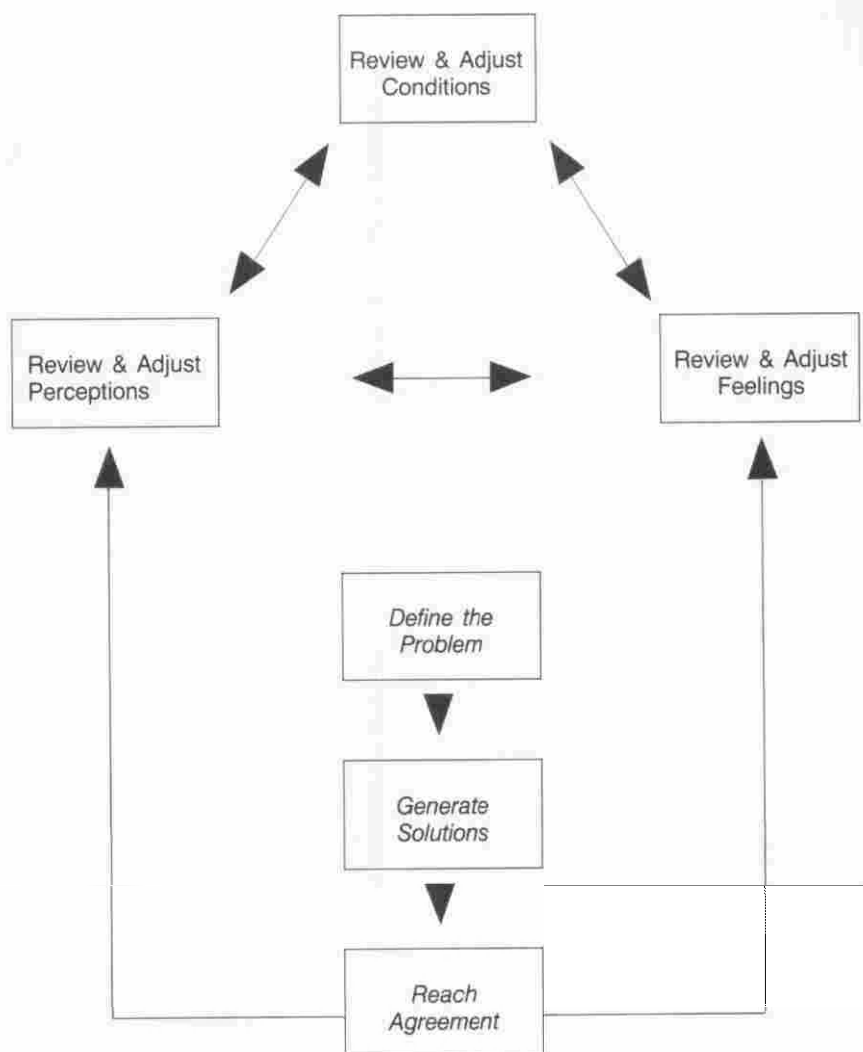
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Figure 1—Integrative Decision-Making Model



the credibility of the topic by pulling it away from a "women's magazine" perception into an organizational milieu. Either publication will achieve this goal.

Building on the prereading, begin the seminar with an overview that includes the what (instructional objectives), the why (shifts in the labor force) and the how (instructional strategies). This miniecture also defines and profiles men and women who choose a dual-career marriage lifestyle. Much of this content appears in professional journals and articles (see *The Myths and Realities of Women in Organizations*, by Louise F. Fitzgerald and Sandra L. Shullman, *T&DJ*, April 1984).

The facilitator then closes the overview by asking managers to identify issues they think are critical to dual-career marriages. These issues are posted on a flip chart for

reference throughout the program. Typically, the issues fall into one of three problem areas: division of household chores, division of childcare responsibilities, and incompatible career paths. The literature is full of solutions to these problems.

Participants may have very strong reactions to the solutions, giving testimonials for some and discounting others. Such responses indicate that the seminar is working. Managers who come to the seminar as Doubting Thomases are hooked when they leave. Some even see ways they can help their supervisors. Others are hooked, but want better answers.

The next phase of the seminar assumes that managers now recognize the need for balance between career and family demands, and want to help their supervisors resolve the concerns. This requires

the introduction of a decision-making model (see Figure 1). Although most decision-making models get the point across, Filley's model allows for more reality testing than most.⁷

Here the facilitator talks through the model beginning with the first stage which reviews and adjusts the conditions of the involved parties to promote cooperation rather than conflict. Second, reality testing helps determine the facts and adjust the perceptions. Third, once again reality testing allows for review and adjustment of feelings and attitudes between the parties. Fourth, together the players define the depersonalized problem. Fifth, they search nonjudgmentally for possible solutions. Sixth, they evaluate the alternative solutions and agree on a single solution.

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One good way to keep the participation going is by providing an example of how the model works using a dual-career marriage example (see Figure 2). In this example of incompatible career paths, his career position requires two people: one to make the deals while the other serves as hostess. Her career now requires travel one-third of the time. The manager helps the supervisor by raising questions at six critical junctures, such as:

- "What conditions led to the conflict?"
- "What are his/her perceptions of the conflict?"
- "What are his/her feelings about the conflict?"
- "What is the problem?"
- "What are some ways the problem can be solved?"
- "What is the one solution they both can agree on?"

Examples can also be drawn from the division of household chores area or the childcare area as well. Participants are now ready to transfer learning from the model to an analysis of case studies.

The case studies can be as simple as the incompatible career paths example (see Figure 2) or complex and detailed depending on the level of the group. For exam-

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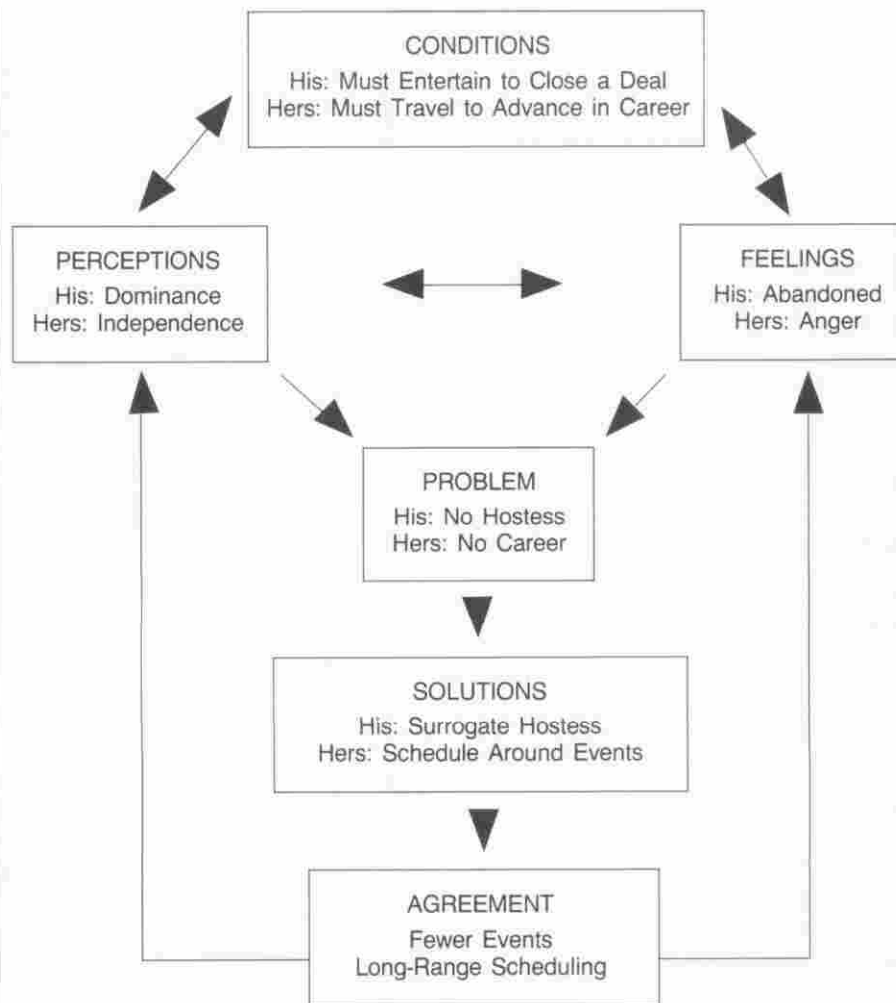
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Figure 2—Incompatible Career Path Example



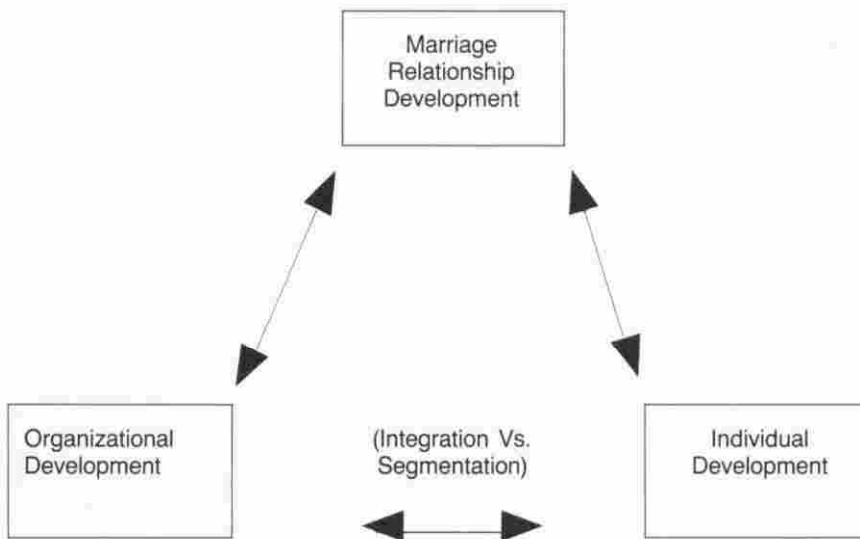
ple, the cases can read like a letter to *Redbook* in which the writer is asking for advice on how the marriage can be saved, or they might take the form of vignettes found in a variety of marriage-counseling textbooks. Whatever the format, the cases ought to lead the participant to answer: How could this dual-career couple resolve their problem(s)? What are the advantages of this solution for the careers and the marriage? What are the disadvantages of this solution for the careers and the marriage?

Managers can work on the cases individually and in groups. Most resist playing marriage counselor, and they should. What they should not resist is the idea that they can help their supervisors by showing an interest in the problems they face. In truth, managers cannot show an interest

until they know what the problems are. Well thought out case studies can familiarize them with the problems of incompatible career paths, division of child care responsibilities and division of household chores.

As managers deal with the concerns of dual-career marriages, they are likely to uncover three sources of tension (see Figure 3). Managers can help supervisors learn how to balance successfully their roles and expectations. Over the past two decades, managers have become increasingly concerned about maintaining the organizational structure with an eye toward helping individuals develop along a career path. The career negotiating process model assumes that managers can help supervisors integrate the three components rather than

Figure 3—Career Negotiating Process



deal with their demands separately. Having integrated the three components, supervisors are now free to innovate and improve the business.

In closing the seminar the facilitator outlines corporate responses to the problems of dual-career marriages. Some firms have experimented with flexible scheduling. Others have established satellite operations in urban areas where more career options and fewer relocations help the spouse pursue a career. Still others make it a policy to hire placement firms to find a comparable employment opportunity for the spouse in the next location. The literature contains several other examples of corporate responses to problems faced by dual-career couples. Finally, resources are provided to further define the manager's role in assisting dual-career couples.

The problems of dual-career marriages are not new. If left unmanaged, they do have a negative effect on a company's ability to innovate and improve. A seminar on dual-career marriage will serve to redefine and fine tune the management process. For managers, effective problem management clarifies the stresses and satisfactions of dual-career marriages, and for individuals trying in isolation to balance career and

marriage/family roles, it is a resource for generating and negotiating solutions.

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