

HOW-TO



Work effectively with your spouse

BY ROGER MCCARTHY & SUE MCCARTHY

Roger McCarthy and Sue McCarthy met in 2003, got married in 2004 and started working together soon afterward, when Sue “temporarily” joined Roger’s business, McCarthy’s Landscaping & Irrigation, after being laid off from an environmental services company. Eight years later, she’s still there. And she’s been an integral part of the 15-year-old, West Boylston, Mass., firm’s growth. The couple has learned working together isn’t always easy, but it can be rewarding. They offer some tips for other Green Industry husband-wife teams. —MARISA PALMIERI

She says

He says

I’M ITALIAN. So, the most challenging thing for me is to remember he’s the boss. It’s our future, it’s our retirement, so I do have a lot of input, but it’s Roger’s company.

OUR OFFICE IS 500 FEET FROM OUR HOUSE. We look out our back window and there’s the building, trucks and trailers. It got to the point where we were talking about work all the time, so we put some rules into place. While I’m making dinner, we’ll talk about the workday. Once dinner’s on the table, it’s over. In the beginning it was tough to wait to talk about things until tomorrow. It took about two years from when I started working with him before we got to that point. We were trying to improve and get systems in place, so there was a lot to talk about. Once we were on an even keel we said, “This can’t be our life all the time.”

WE NEVER WORK ON A SUNDAY AND RARELY ON SATURDAYS. It took a lot to separate ourselves, but once we did it was better for us as a couple. But it’s still hard, even for me. Once we went away for the weekend and I said, “What do you want to do with that invoice?” He said, “We’ll talk about it Monday.” And I said, “Yes we will.”

I HAVE ONE SON. He’s 27. He’s worked for the company since 2004. Last year he got into a motorcycle accident. He hasn’t been able to work for over a year. It put everything into perspective. We hope he’ll be able to come back next season.

YOU’VE GOT TO WATCH EACH OTHER’S STRESS LEVEL. Roger had a heart attack at 41 years old. He doesn’t smoke. Doesn’t eat bad. It was all stress related. After that he went from working 90 hours a week to maybe 70. We had started not talking about work at home around the same time. Sometimes he has a lot on his plate. He keeps it all on his plate instead of asking for help. I have to say, “Stop. Take a breath. And what can I take off your plate?”

IT’S CHALLENGING TO SEPARATE CHURCH AND STATE. We work together. We live together. We spend a lot of time together.

MAKE SURE YOU SEPARATE YOUR TASKS. Set up job descriptions for each person so they know what they’re going to do and don’t step on each other’s toes. The first couple years Sue joined, it was crazy for me to let go of everything and try not to micromanage her, not worry about what she was going to do and how it was going to be done. I’d been doing all the invoicing, billing, setting my own appointments and sometimes back then I was in the field, too. I knew my life would get easier, but having done it for so long with my way of doing it, it was tough to let her take over certain things.

SHE’S ALWAYS GOT MY BACK. I can walk away and not worry that she’s going to let things slip through the cracks. She proved it and my guys proved themselves back in 2006 when I had a heart attack and I was removed completely for a few weeks and part time for a few weeks. I worried about things because it’s just who I am to worry, but the customers really didn’t even know I was out unless someone told them.

WE TRY TO ENJOY EACH OTHER. We don’t work on Sundays. We really limit our Saturdays. Even for our employees, Saturdays are strictly a rain day. Allowing your employees to have two-day weekends, they’ll work harder for you Monday through Friday.

YOUR RELATIONSHIP HAS TO BE STRONG OUTSIDE OF WORK BECAUSE WORK WON’T MAKE IT STRONG. If you don’t have a strong relationship emotionally, spiritually or however you define it, working together won’t make it stronger. It will drive it apart. There are so many pressures on meeting expectations: customers, financial institutions, payroll. You know the old saying, “When money troubles walk through the door, love flies out the window.” It’s the same in a business. **LM**