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# Keeping

## Maintaining the Delicate Balance Between Family, Work

**T**he fact that Janet Beatty met her husband while working at White's Hardware is no great surprise. Like so many other independent business operators, the line separating Janet's work and her personal life was long ago smudged away.

SO 11 YEARS AGO WHEN SHE LOCKED the keys inside one of the rental trucks parked outside her family's business in Tucson, Ariz., perhaps it was entrepreneur's karma that prompted her to call the local fire department for help.

"Jeremy is a firefighter and he was the one that responded to the call," Janet remembers. "As a hardware store, we would always have the guys from the fire department coming in so I felt pretty comfortable calling them."

As a thank you for rescuing her keys from the truck, Janet baked cookies for the fire crew. Soon after, Jeremy returned the cookie tin along with a flower and a request for a date.

After courting for about one year, the couple who met in a hardware store parking lot, were married.

Today, ten years and two kids later, Jeremy and Janet are living their lives like so many independent business owners, juggling football practice with

employee schedules and squeezing story time in between shipments to the store.

This same type of story is played out in hardware stores, home centers and lumberyards all across the country. Just about every familial relationship is represented on salesfloors from Maine to Montana.

That's why *Hardware Retailing* decided to talk to some of these families and share their stories and advice on how they are able to run successful businesses, raise kids, nurture their relationships and continue to "keep it real."

### Janet and Jeremy Beatty

**Business:** White's Hardware, Tucson, Ariz.  
**Family:** Married 10 years, two kids: Austin, 8; and Logan, 4.

Janet Beatty is surrounded by boys. Not only does she work full-time with her father, Norman White, at the family's two-store hardware operation, she also

raises two sons with her husband Jeremy, a firefighter.

"Sometimes I think being around so many boys makes me a little crazy," she says. But the support she receives from all the boys in her life more than makes up for the headaches.

"My family keeps me grounded. When work is stressful or hectic, I like to go home and throw myself into my family; it's how I relieve stress," she says.

And there has been a lot of stress



# it REAL



lately in Janet's life. As vice president of operations for White's, Janet recently oversaw the expansion of one of the company's stores from 4,000 square feet to 8,000 square feet. Dealing with all the typical challenges of doubling the size of a store, Janet also had a family to run — dinners to make, football practices to get to, books to read.

"The problem with trying to juggle family with business, especially in a family business, is that you never leave it

at the office," she says. "You are always thinking and talking about it. What promotion to run next; what products to order? It's always there."

That's why Janet and Jeremy rely on open communication to keep their relationship healthy. "We talk all the time, and we rely a lot on each other for support," says Janet. "I also have a great staff that helps out tremendously."

As far as Jeremy is concerned, Janet is an inspiration.

*For Janet Beatty, keeping it real means saving plenty of time for her family, which includes two young boys with a lot of energy.*

"I would definitely be lost without her," says Jeremy. "She is the rock that holds our family together and I couldn't ask for a better wife and mother for our kids."

#### How They Keep it Real

- **Never Forgetting the Big Stuff** — Janet says she always weighs the importance



of work against the importance of spending time with her family. "The business doesn't go away, it is always there," she says. "But you just can't forget you have to shut that off and take time for your family. That's what's important. That's my relaxation. I may be sitting at football practice with my laptop out, but I'm not going to miss that practice."

- **Run a Tight Ship** — Janet Beatty is impeccably organized. Both her business and her family run like clockwork because she meticulously tracks all the moving parts — from school plays to circular orders. "I have a phone that has a calendar on it so it is with me at all times. I'd be lost without it."

#### **Bobby & Carolyn Fuller**

**Business:** Fuller & Sons Hardware, Little Rock, Ark.

**Family:** Two sons: Jeff, 31; and J.R., 28.

Bobby Fuller and his wife, Carolyn, began working together before they ever got involved in the hardware business. In fact, Carolyn began working with Bobby when he was the front-man for the musical group Bobby Fuller & The Fuller Brothers.

"We were a band that traveled around all over the country," recalls Bobby. "We played all over the United States and in Canada. We toured 50 weeks out of the year."

After living the showbiz life for a while, however, Bobby said the transition to hardware was an easy one for him and Carolyn. "Show business is a hard business," he

says. "I don't think we realized at the time how hard it was because it was just what we did. But looking back now, I think we are better suited in our careers — I am a morning person."

Upon leaving the road behind, Bobby and Carolyn joined the family business Fuller & Sons Hardware in Little Rock, Ark., which had been around since 1921.

Today, Bobby and Carolyn are running the business and their two children, Jeff, 31 and J.R., 28, are also big parts of the operation.

"I've heard from so many people, 'how can you stand working with your wife every day, all day long?' Same thing with my sons," says Bobby. "I guess the answer is simple, it's just what we do. We enjoy it."

Bobby says he and his sons also have another secret for maintaining a harmonious work and family life. "None of us like to upset 'mom,' so if we can go about our business and not upset her, we do just fine," he jokes.

#### **How they Keep it Real**

- **Divide and Conquer** — According to Bobby Fuller, identifying family members' strengths and giving them responsibilities based on those strengths is a key to success. At Fuller & Sons, Carolyn is the secretary/treasurer of the company; Jeff is in charge of advertising; and J.R. has a keen mind for business, according to Bobby. "I think if there's any secret to what we do, it is that we delegate," he says. "That means we ask them to make decisions in their areas of responsibility. I might have the ultimate

*ABOVE LEFT: Communication helps the Messa family and the staff at their hardware store keep an open and respectful relationship.*

*ABOVE: Delegating responsibility is the way Bobby Fuller (right), his son J.R. and the rest of the family not only work together but also run an effective business.*

say, but I wouldn't give them an area to be responsible for if I didn't think they could do it better than I can."

#### **Trevor & Jodi Messa**

**Business:** South Park True Value, Fairplay, Colo.

**Family:** Married seven years, two kids: Charlie, 4; and Alex, 2 ½.

After working as a general contractor for nearly two decades, Trevor Messa was ready for a change. But when he came home and suggested to his wife, Jodi, that they open a hardware store, she thought he had spent a little too much time working in the sun.

"I think my first reaction was, 'are you crazy?'," jokes Jodi. "I wasn't sure if he was kidding or not, but the thought of putting everything on the line to open a business together scared me to death."

After the initial shock wore off, the idea actually made a lot of sense to Jodi. There wasn't really any competition for business in the small town of Fairplay, about an hour and a half outside of Denver, and with Trevor's experience as a contractor, a hardware store was a natural fit.

A short time later, the 10,000-square-foot South Park True Value was born, and Trevor and Jodi were working side by side in their new family adventure.

Add to this husband/wife dynamic a business partner, Patty Carnahan, and two small children: Charlie, 4; and Alex 2 ½; and the Messas had bought into more than a new business venture; they had bought into a new way of life.

"Aside from the initial fear, we both knew it was going to be a good thing," said Jodi. "I think we had a few concerns about working together at first but actually being in the store together is kind of fun. At least we knew we would be able to have lunch with each other."

So far the results have been fun as well. The store has been open for nearly one year and the town has responded enthusiastically to the new family business. But this business success also translates to more time in the store.

"I think the biggest change for us is that we have had to become more flexible,"

says Trevor. "We try to juggle things so that we get stuff done at the store and we are also able to tend to our family's needs."

For example, often times Trevor will run home at lunch to watch Alex while Jodi runs to pick up Charlie from preschool.

"It's really a juggling act," adds Jodi. "There are plenty of nights where we are sitting in bed together and putting in an order, but that's okay. It allows us to get work done without sacrificing our time with the kids."

#### How they Keep it Real

• **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate** — Jodi Messa is extremely proud of the fact that they have maintained their original employee base at the store since opening. She and her husband, Trevor, stress openness as one of

the key factors in maintaining their work/home relationship. "If you have a problem or concern, bring it up in a respectful way, talk about it and work together to come up with a solution," says Trevor. "This is what we do with each other, and it's also the same thing we do with our employees."

• **Play to Your Strengths** — Another key to balancing their personal relationship with their work life requires Jodi and Trevor to understand what each partner brings to the table. "Jodi is really good with the creative side of things and running departments that require some style sense," says Trevor. "I am a little better with the tools and DIY stuff because of my background. We try to recognize each other's strong points and defer to one another in those areas." ➔

## Ask the Doctor

Hardware Retailing asked Dr. Shirley Kurnoff, author, mother of three and recognized expert in the field of work-life balance, to share her insight on what measures individuals can take to keep it all together and prevent their lives from getting out of balance.

**HR:** When both spouses work in the business, what are some guidelines to determine who handles family emergencies that crop up, such as a sick kid?

**Kurnoff:** It is important to have one person as the designated person. Usually it is the mother who takes on this role.

**HR:** Some retailers are accustomed to working seven days a week in their stores. What steps can they take to delegate responsibility to ensure they are able to take more time off?

**Kurnoff:** Burnout is the important piece and working seven days a week is not healthy (time out to replenish is imperative.) Delegation is critical here.

**HR:** How important is it for both men and women to have a support network beyond their family to help them talk

through issues that arise in their family and work life? Are women more likely to have such a support network and rely on it regularly?

**Kurnoff:** Usually women are the more connected ones because, in most instances, they take on the family responsibilities ("second shift") too, and need more pragmatic strategies to cope with both roles of work and family. A support network is highly important for these working mothers to gain insight into how to juggle their diverse roles.

**HR:** Has the role of the work-family demand changed over time? Is there any way to tell what new demands or stressors the future might hold for a person trying to balance these demands?

**Kurnoff:** It has changed considerably since the 1980s when the dual-earner family first surfaced, but the role of women taking on the second shift has not changed immeasurably. Plus, working mothers of today want to incorporate "intensive" mothering by trying to achieve perfection in that area, and that adds an additional layer of stress. By keeping family responsibilities "simple"

(less complicated) and outsourcing where possible, some of the domestic chores, this will ultimately allow for more calmness in the home.

**HR:** Has increased use of technology such as cell phones, PDAs and laptops made it easier for entrepreneurs to achieve a work-life balance or has it led to more problems related to the need to stay in touch with the business 24/7?

**Kurnoff:** New technology (PDA, cell phone, etc.) has facilitated working from "anywhere" or "anytime" and this has been a bonus, provided parameters are in place, i.e. no business communication between specific hours such as 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

**About Dr. Kurnoff:** Shirley Kurnoff's most recent book, "The Human Side of Working Mothers, Today's Technology Facilitating the Sought After Work-Life Balance," is scheduled to be published this spring. She holds degrees from Manchester University, England; Stanford University; and Macquarie University, Sydney Australia. She has taught at the University of California and Cal State Monterey Bay.