

Your unsung hero

You wouldn't have gotten to where you are without help; it's time to show it

Any victory requires the support of a village. Business — not to mention life — is a team sport, and every successful leader has a dedicated supporting cast who helps them get there.

Within that cast, there is one unsung hero who stands above all others in enabling an executive's success — the spouse.



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Please note: I am the last person who would pen a sexist column. I use the term “spouse” and the pronoun “she” to spare you the annoyance of constantly seeing she/he or spouse/partner. But rest assured: my words apply to all of you “he” spouse/partners out there. I know, because my husband is one!

Your unsung hero

Your spouse must be as strong as an ox, with shoulders broad enough to carry your burdens as well as her own — and your children's. She must have the flexibility of Gumby, the hospitality know-how of Martha Stewart and the smarts of a weekend news anchor.

She is expected to be attractive, well coiffed and have the stamina of a marathon runner.

She interacts with your team and board members equally, and privately you rely on her judgment to help shape your thinking about your team and board challenges.

Out of necessity, she is the lone juggler of kids, house maintenance and aging parents or extended family.

You are always available on the other end of text messages, emails or calls, but rarely do you have the bandwidth or flexibility to be the taxi service for doctor's appointments, gift buying/ mailing, car repairs, soccer games or teenage broken hearts.

She manages it all with grace and aplomb, on behalf of you both.

Plan and celebrate

Your spouse is the unsung hero in your world. Her duty and service are deserving of recognition and celebration, especially as you transition from a corporate career.

She has been a tireless hero, without pay, title or performance review. Thanks and gratitude are likely long overdue. So, what form is best?

First, there is no substitute for words of appreciation, whether you choose to write a letter, find a card or simply express your sentiments directly. Be specific. Detail your feelings with words and examples. Ensure that the intensity of your words mirrors the intensity of your appreciation.

Then, show your appreciation by planning something your spouse would love. The basic rule is: “reinforcers” (things that make one feel appreciated) are determined by the receiver (your spouse), not by the giver (you). While you may love a his-and-her big game hunting expedition, she may prefer a weekend in New York City.

Make it all about her. Do something that she would find special and memorable, and demonstrate your unwavering appreciation by giving her top priority. Toast her for all that she has sacrificed.

And finally, devote time and conversation to asking about her goals, as you contemplate your own. Pause to honor both of your careers as you plan together what's next, leaving room for continued, healthy independence.

There's no greater early transition priority than celebrating your unsung hero. ●