

Teamwork

8. The “Who Does What List”

Rationale

Running a home is a complex endeavor. Thousands of tasks and responsibilities, but there’s no job descriptions, no org chart, and usually no discussion around who wants to do what, who’s best at what or who’s best suited for which jobs. This exercise is to help you have a collaborative conversation with your wife to bring clarity to some of these roles and responsibilities.

Challenge Assignment

There’s usually tension in a marriage over “home” work. Some guys fully participate at home; some just do what their daddy’s did and never lift a finger. Guys will often think they do a lot, but their wives see it very different.

In this exercise, you’ll print out two copies of the following “home” work items, one for you and one for her. Each of you will go through the list and put “him” where you believe you do the task and then either “him” or “her” in the “ideal” column. For example, if you “wash the windows” you’d write “him” in the now column. If you believe you should wash the windows, you’ll write “him” again in the ideal column. If there’s a task you’re doing but think your wife would do in an ideal world, you’d write “him” in the ‘now’ column and “her” in the ideal. Conversely if there’s something your wife is doing that you should take on, you’d write “her” in the ‘now’ column and “him” in the ideal column.

After you’ve finished, set a time to sit down and leisurely talk about the list. Compare your answers and collaborate so both you and your wife have a clear understanding of who’s to do what. Jot down “your final answer” by each task so you’ll each know what you’re on the hook for. Revisit your lists at least annually because circumstances change and you’ll be shifting tasks constantly.

And don’t fall into “that’s not my job.” This is intended to help you clarify who has the lead on these things...not always who does them. You’re both responsible for your marriage and your home.

A few other cautions...

- 1.) The length of your lists isn't important. It's the clarity of 'who's got the ball' and overall agreement that matters. Resentment comes from unmet (and unspoken) expectations.
- 2.) Some of these tasks are clearly shared. But lean into those in particular. When two people are responsible, nobody's responsible. Try to agree who's the "quarterback" in as many of these tasks as possible.
- 3.) While this list is exhausting, it's not exhaustive. Feel free to add anything that needs to be added for your household. Add it and talk about it.

Come to your group ready to share what happened as a result of this exercise.

Who Does What Task List

Running Errands	Now:	Ideal:
Taking clothes to the cleaners	Now:	Ideal:
Washing windows	Now:	Ideal:
Planning the food menu	Now:	Ideal:
Going grocery shopping	Now:	Ideal:
Cooking dinner	Now:	Ideal:
Setting the table	Now:	Ideal:
Clearing the table after dinner	Now:	Ideal:
Cleaning the kitchen	Now:	Ideal:
Cleaning the bathrooms	Now:	Ideal:
Putting out clean towels	Now:	Ideal:
Keeping counters clean	Now:	Ideal:
General tidying up	Now:	Ideal:
Getting the car serviced	Now:	Ideal:
Putting gas in the car	Now:	Ideal:
Auto insurance, tags and taxes	Now:	Ideal:
Sorting incoming mail	Now:	Ideal:
Paying the bills	Now:	Ideal:
Balancing the checkbook	Now:	Ideal:
Buying birthday, anniversary, "thank You", graduation, wedding and		
Sympathy cards	Now:	Ideal:
Writing and sending cards	Now:	Ideal:
Keeping the family address book	Now:	Ideal:
Handling phone messages	Now:	Ideal:

Returning family phone calls/email	Now:	Ideal:
Saving money	Now:	Ideal:
Taking out garbage and trash	Now:	Ideal:
Recycling	Now:	Ideal:
Doing the laundry	Now:	Ideal:
Folding the laundry	Now:	Ideal:
Ironing	Now:	Ideal:
Putting the clean clothes away	Now:	Ideal:
Sweeping kitchen and eating areas	Now:	Ideal:
Mopping and waxing floors	Now:	Ideal:
Changing light bulbs	Now:	Ideal:
Managing repair of appliances	Now:	Ideal:
Making the beds	Now:	Ideal:
Defrosting/cleaning refrigerator	Now:	Ideal:
Shopping for clothing	Now:	Ideal:
Planning travel	Now:	Ideal:
Home Repair	Now:	Ideal:
Remodeling	Now:	Ideal:
Home maintenance	Now:	Ideal:
Buying furniture	Now:	Ideal:
Redecorating home	Now:	Ideal:
Buying items for the home	Now:	Ideal:
Buying new appliances	Now:	Ideal:
Sewing and mending	Now:	Ideal:
Straightening kitchen cabinets	Now:	Ideal:
Yard and garden work	Now:	Ideal:
Lawn, tree & shrubbery maintenance	Now:	Ideal:
Errands to the bank	Now:	Ideal:
Houseplant Care	Now:	Ideal:
Straightening & rearranging closets	Now:	Ideal:
House ready for guests	Now:	Ideal:
Party preparations	Now:	Ideal:
Buying children gifts (Christmas & Birthdays)	Now:	Ideal:
Taking children to school	Now:	Ideal:
Picking children up from school	Now:	Ideal:
Child care after school	Now:	Ideal:
Child meals and lunches	Now:	Ideal:
Pediatrician	Now:	Ideal:
Child homework	Now:	Ideal:

Child baths	Now:	Ideal:
Child discipline	Now:	Ideal:
Bedtime with kids	Now:	Ideal:
Dealing with a sick child	Now:	Ideal:
Handling child crises	Now:	Ideal:
Dealing with a child's emotions	Now:	Ideal:
Teacher conferences	Now:	Ideal:
Dealing with the schools	Now:	Ideal:
Special children's events	Now:	Ideal:
Child birthday and other parties	Now:	Ideal:
Child's lessons	Now:	Ideal:
Child's play dates	Now:	Ideal:
Shopping for children's stuff	Now:	Ideal:
Buying presents for kids' friends	Now:	Ideal:
Keeping in touch with kin	Now:	Ideal:
Preparing for holidays	Now:	Ideal:
Planning vacations	Now:	Ideal:
Planning getaways	Now:	Ideal:
Planning romantic dates	Now:	Ideal:
Planning quiet evenings at home	Now:	Ideal:
Planning weekends	Now:	Ideal:
Initiating lovemaking	Now:	Ideal:
Planning dinner out	Now:	Ideal:
Family outings, drives, picnics	Now:	Ideal:
Financial planning	Now:	Ideal:
Major purchases (cars, etc.)	Now:	Ideal:
Managing investments	Now:	Ideal:
Talking about the relationship	Now:	Ideal:
Get-togethers with friends	Now:	Ideal:
Keeping in touch with friends	Now:	Ideal:
Doing the taxes	Now:	Ideal:
Legal matters (e.g. wills)	Now:	Ideal:
Coordinating family's medical care	Now:	Ideal:
Coordinating annual physicals	Now:	Ideal:
Coordinating family's dental care	Now:	Ideal:
Prescriptions & other health areas	Now:	Ideal:
Exercise & Fitness	Now:	Ideal:
Lead recreational outings	Now:	Ideal:

Debrief

Everyone was to complete the 'who does what list' exercise from the separate handout distributed last month. This might have been a 'fight starter' ...or an 'eye opener'. Lead a conversation about the exercise, not about who does what in the home, but about how it went with your wife and with theirs. What 'hot spots' were uncovered and how did you move beyond them? Encourage each guy share the results of the exercise. Most guys will be surprised by the number of duties involved in running a household. Some may even be shocked by how much their wives do. A few might even wake up to realize how little they do to help their wives with these tasks.

Encourage everyone to engage at home...to carry a share of the load. Challenge men who are prideful and think they're too good to do stuff around the house. Maybe the most important outcome of this exercise is the honest dialog with your wife about the things that affect her every day. Don't ignore her need for help with the house and with your kids.

Adapted from TGottman, John; Nan Silver (2002-02-04). The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work. Random House, Inc. Kindle Edition.