

Mission Ready

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Reaching Out to the “Other Half” of your Workforce, Part One

It positively amazes us that so many management workshops, designed to teach ways in which to spur the rank and file to increased levels of performance, ignore the “other half” of the workforce—the spouses and families of those officially on the payroll. But it would be folly indeed to underestimate the power of loved ones to motivate, or to de-motivate, your employees—and even greater folly not to try to enlist the support of this broad, influential base.

As managers, we must realize that our “competition” is not made up only of the companies out there vying for our market share; we may also be in competition with the families of our employees. And guess who’s going to win? You may have your employee for the length of the workday, but as soon as he or she gets home, others will have their ear—at the dinner table, or on the pillow—and if *these* individuals are not friends of your company, their counsel could undo much of your own hard work. When your employee hears that “Martha’s husband, Jack, says there’s an opening at his company,” and that “Jack makes a lot more money, and comes home at a decent hour,”—and hears variations on this theme day after day—it will become increasingly difficult to counter with your own motivational message.

Corporate life is often hard, with long days at the office, and frequent Saturdays “lost” to the family because of an important project. While “Honey, I have to work” is an accurate enough explanation, it is of little compensation to a spouse who is unaware of the nature of the work, and whose only conception of the company is of an institution that prints the paycheck—among so many other institutions that may pay more, or demand less. If that spouse is not somehow brought “on board,” your employee will be very vulnerable to competitive offers. If, on the other hand, the wife or husband is a firm ally of the company—or is, at the very least, sympathetic with the corporate mission—you will find that retaining your employee will be a much easier task.

Would it come as a surprise, to learn that the Marine Corps has learned this lesson well? One may not associate such a rough and tough, Spartan organization with the awareness, and the wherewithal, to have instituted a major family outreach program, but few companies could match the Marine Corps’ commitment and concern for the other half of its “workforce.” In Part Two, we will examine some of the enlightened managerial practices of this elite fighting force, and suggest ways in which *your* company can gain the support of the families and friends of your employ-