

Household Management

THE MISSING INGREDIENT IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Sandra van der Merwe



Most women involved in an occupation run households. Inevitably they are faced with twin responsibilities — those pertaining to their jobs and those which develop at home. Their concern is to do both well and this double load of duties often influences them at work both emotionally and in more visible forms. As a result their careers suffer.

Household Management and Performance at Work

Women who have household responsibilities often tend to spend part of their working day and working energy thinking about home related activities that have to be done, manipulating their work time to fit in these chores and recovering from the tensions of the previous day, evening or weekend.

Household duties and the stress and problems associated with running a home and maintaining an acceptable standard of living and lifestyle for a family can intrude on work and consequently affect productivity and performance. Listed below are problems commonly caused by household pressures, each of which, to some extent, inhibits and can prejudice a woman's opportunity for advancement in her chosen field of work.

- * low attention span and concentration level
- * lack of real commitment to a project or to the organization
- * fatigue
- * stress and tension
- * 'clock watching'
- * low flexibility and mobility

Women need to learn to run their homes as household managers in the same way they run their departments or divisions, charity institutions or committees. By understanding the concept of household management and using management skills to be more competent in running their homes they can find that the payoff they get is both tangible and substantial. In particular, using household management principles means that individuals are:

- * less involved with crises at home
- * more involved with their work
- * more flexible in terms of what they can do and when
- * less prone to financial problems
- * less tired at work
- * more likely to commit themselves to long term careers

- * more evenly tempered
- * less likely to be absent from work
- * less likely to need special time off work
- * more willing to work longer hours when necessary
- * more fulfilled as individuals

The Principles of Household Management

Because running a home is similar to running a business, management principles can be adapted and put to very good use by a person running a household. Like a business manager, the household manager has resources with which to achieve pre-established goals. The central and most obvious resource is income — the household budget. But there are other resources as well. Time is a precious resource to the household manager and should be utilized fully, together with the special talents individual members of the household have, and the skills of hired help.

Management is a way of life and a household manager, like a business manager, is a person who gets things done by using certain principles. Her objective is to achieve a lifestyle for her family and for herself — either more leisure or a career.

The classic management principles are the core of the household manager's philosophy and can be incorporated into the thinking and execution of most home-connected activities.

Planning — the first principle

This involves setting goals and deciding how they will be achieved — both long term, for example children's education, medium term, for instance a vacation, and short term, perhaps a dinner party, as well as day-to-day activities like shopping, and special events such as building a house. Special attention should be given to the principles of:

- * time management — planning and scheduling time
- * money management — planning the household budget — the shopping plan, spending, saving, borrowing and investing.

Organizing — the second principle

Like planning, organizing must be done on a day-to-day basis. To enable the household manager to do a solid day's work, details of home activities have to be arranged to achieve plans — realistically this needs the support of other people, apart from the household manager, and:

- * deciding what activities have to be done
- * assigning jobs to members of the household
- * delegating responsibilities to other people
- * setting deadlines for the completion of tasks

Motivation — the third principle

Household management is a team effort, involving every member of the household, including, in certain circumstances, hired help. The key to success is the commitment of every person to achieving the household's objectives. The household manager must learn to:

- * understand what is important to each member of the household
- * use an effective recipe to motivate household members and staff
- * involve all members of the household in decision making
- * train individuals where and when necessary to do chores
- * generate and maintain a team spirit in the household

Communication — the fourth principle

A household manager is dependent on others to assist in running a home smoothly. An essential ingredient is communication, knowing:

- * how to communicate and the rules for clear communication
- * the reasons for poor communication
- * how to effectively give instructions

Control — the fifth principle

The household manager must constantly be in control in supervising and periodically monitoring the household's

plans and activities, both short term, for instance the money budget and day-to-day, for example preparing for a dinner party. Controlling involves:

- * learning how to supervise effectively
- * asking the right questions
- * giving and receiving feedback
- * being flexible if things go wrong

Add Household Management to Adult Training Programmes

Women need to learn to apply basic management principles at home in order to become more efficient at their household activities. There are two good reasons for this. Firstly, it would give housewives who want to work and have the capability the opportunity to do so. Also it would make women who are employed or active in community affairs freer both psychologically and physically to devote more time, energy, concentration and effort to their careers.

This article has emphasized that household management can be a valuable asset for women involved in an occupation and has briefly touched on the areas of household management in which women need to develop competence. The question is whose responsibility it is to do this type of training? Ideally it should be done by progressive organizations prepared to allocate some of their training time and budget into making their women employees better household managers and, consequently, better employees. Women without this advantage though must find an independent way to become household managers and then capitalize on the results.

Editor's Note: This article is an overview of a complex subject and we expect a varied response from our readers. The author is willing to develop and discuss the subject matter further depending upon the interest shown.

