



Partners in life, partners in business

Some married couples find that love, commerce can work together beautifully



MICHAEL PATRICK/NEWS SENTINEL

Vergil and Kathy Metts run a company together. The couple sits inside the Impact Associates office in Maryville.

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More than 15 years ago, Dane and Meg Scism were at a turning point.

Dane Scism was selling cellular phones. Meg Scism was just out of school with a degree in finance.

The couple, who were engaged at the time, saw promise in the mobile phone industry and in 1993 joined the ranks of other husband-and-wife business partners when they took over a company Dane Scism was working for.

"Driving back from Thanksgiving, we decided we could make a run at it. She was the bookkeeper, and I was the sales force. We never looked back. It's been a wild success ever since," Dane Scism said of their business, Knoxville-based Cellular Sales.

What started with one store in Farragut has become the nation's largest retailer of Verizon Wireless with more than 300 locations in 20 states.

Business-life partners

Nevertheless, it's a scenario many couples choose to avoid. The results can be devastating — an end to the business, or worse, the end of the marriage.

While it may not be for everybody, those who have been successful say the benefits of sharing a professional dream and spending more time with their loved one are worth it.

"The fun part is getting to actually work with your partner in business who is the same as your partner in life. It's very enriching and rewarding. You know your partner has your back," said Kathy Metts, co-owner of Impact Associates.

Metts and her husband, Vergil Metts, started the Maryville-based consulting company 10 years ago after careers that included working at TVA.

"We felt there was a need for management consulting. ... Help businesses and executives and do it better than what we were seeing in the marketplace. We had a clear vision of what we wanted and how we wanted to do it," Kathy Metts said.

It was something they both wanted to do and they felt they had complementary strengths and skills that would benefit the business.

Impact Associates, which pro-

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SPECIAL TO THE NEWS SENTINEL

Dane and Meg Scism started Cellular Sales in 1993. The husband-and-wife business partners have overseen the growth of their company, which includes more than 300 locations in 20 states.



AMY SMOTHERMAN BURGESS/NEWS SENTINEL

Wes and Danielle Hope pose at their studio. They run their own business, Hope Photography, which specializes in photos at weddings.

COUPLES

from C1

vides services in areas of training, consulting, assessment and research and events planning, has grown to include clients worldwide like Turner Broadcasting and Turner Studios, Bush Brothers, U.S. Department of Defense and the Royal Petroleum Ministry of Thailand.

In the beginning, the biggest challenge for the Metts was getting others to see them as separate entities.

"People made assumptions (that) just because we were married I could be a courier of information for him. I've got my own pile of homework," Kathy Metts said.

"That was the biggest chal-

lenge — getting others to see us as separate entities," Vergil Metts replied.

Both informed and opinionated, the couple would at times "thrash out" an idea with lively discussions, something that was initially uncomfortable for their associates.

"Bringing different ideas to the table and having a constructive dialogue is very important to the business," Vergil Metts said.

Every now and then, Wes and Danielle Hope admit they "butt heads."

The couple founded Hope Photography 10 years ago after getting disappointing photos from their own wedding. They have only recently devoted their full attention to the business.

"It works out well. We re-

ally complement each other. I wouldn't have a wedding business without her," said Wes Hope, a former photojournalist with the Maryville Daily Times.

"We realize there is something different about us. We've clicked and have been at each other's side. Everywhere I go she's there and vice versa, and it's carried over to our business," he added.

"I think our brides like it because they see us together. Photography is really personal. If we're happy together, it shows," Danielle Hope said.

Roles defined

While both take photographs, Wes Hope is in charge of the images. Danielle handles client calls.

It's a clearly defined role

that husband-and-wife teams say is a must to have a successful business.

"You must define your role and what is expected from each person and try not to cross boundaries. You have to communicate and put personal feelings aside," said Meg Scism, who admitted the couple never fought about money, just time.

The Scisms jobs were clear-cut from the beginning. Meg Scism did everything that had to do with paper, deadlines and money. Dane Scism did everything related to sales.

"We brought different things to the table. She worked incredibly hard and did a miraculous job. She did the books when we had \$100 million in revenues in operations without any help. She

was pretty amazing," Dane Scism said.

Having an open line of communication has been key for the Hopes.

"We are very open and honest with each other. We let the other know what we're feeling. We don't hold it in and let it eat at us," Danielle Hope said.

Some things, however, are unspoken.

"It's like we're telepathic. If we're at a wedding, I can just give her a look," Wes Hope said.

"We know what the other needs," Danielle Hope replied.

The Metts acknowledge their different personalities and have offices in different parts of the building.

Vergil Metts is an introvert and needs contemplative time

while Kathy Metts describes herself as an extrovert who is "immersed in the middle of things."

"As our business has grown and evolved we continued to revise our roles and responsibilities and keep them contemporary with what our business needs," Kathy Metts said.

"You need to consciously set time for your relationship because a business can easily overwhelm the relationship," Vergil Metts said.

Said Dane Scism, "It helps when you have a really great spouse. I never thought I would be the kind of guy who would work with my spouse. It has worked out great."

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