

## Can't do it all alone? Engage the family



**By Phil Sasso**  
**Contributing Editor**

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**Q.** There isn't enough time to get all my work done. Are there any time management tricks distributors are using to put more hours in their day?

**A.** I'm too busy to deal with time management, maybe in a future column. (Is procrastination considered good or bad time management?) This month, I'll focus on what I'll call "buying time."

After your first day as a tool distributor, you know it's a big job. The good news: you're your own boss. The bad news: you're the only employee. That means you're in charge of sales, operations, bookkeeping and everything else right down to the janitorial duties. But you don't have to go it alone.

Many distributors involve their family in the business. Some find it fulfilling to work together, teach their children values, and buy back some time. You can make more time for sales and collections and have more personal and family time. In fact, for many distributors, the tool business is a family business.

"I tell everyone my wife runs the business; I just drive the truck," says Mac Tools distributor Dennis Hash whose wife, Christy, runs the "back office." His son, Donovan, 9, and daughter, Alyssa, 11, excitedly badgered him to wash the truck or help out in the business when it launched three years

ago. "That was then," laughs Hash. "The 'new' has worn out now."

Hash, whose Northwest Arkansas route includes Walmart's home office in Bentonville, says he knows all about family business. His parents, brother and sister all own businesses and he grew up on the family orchard/nursery. But the last thing he wanted was to be running his own business.

"I just wanted a job where I'd punch in and punch out," says Hash. Over time, he realized business ownership was in his blood and he got into the tool business. "Eventually, you turn into your parents," Hash jokes.

To make the best use of your family's time, try aligning your family members' skills and talents with your needs. If your daughter is artistic, ask her to

create your signs. If your son is a techie, let him help set up your new laptop. They'll enjoy the job more and you'll have a weight off your shoulders. Obviously, things like sweeping the floor don't involve skill or talent. They're just some of the "gotta get done" jobs in life. Assign them as appropriate.

Sometimes it's not just about having a helper but more about having a partner.

"I told my wife she can never die before me or I'll be in trouble," jokes Mac Tools distributor Joe Matuk, who says Geri, his wife of 24 years, is the backbone of his operations. "This is our business, it's not just my business."

Since they opened their franchise serving Tinley Park and Orland Park, IL about nine years ago, Geri has handled ordering, checking-in inventory, and bookkeeping – giving Joe more time for sales and collections. Joe and Geri don't just work well together in business; when they were first married, they tore off three layers of roofing and reshingled their home together. Now that's a power couple!

**Q.** A lot of distributors put their wives and kids to work. I don't have a family, yet. And if I keep up the long hours I'm putting in, I probably never will. What can I do?

**A.** First, let me clarify – I'm not saying anyone should use family members as free labor. (I call it "buying time," not "stealing time.") If your kids do real work, they should get at least a modest compensation for their contribution. Paying your kids for working may even have positive tax implications. Ask your accountant.

When Mac Tools District Manager Jim Holtz of West Valley, NY was



*Josh and Katie Canal have formed a good working relationship and hope to build a multi-route operation.*



a distributor, he says he felt it was important to teach his kids a work ethic by getting them involved in doing small things like breaking down boxes or sweeping the truck. He gave them a modest paycheck for their service and feels that it helped teach them the value of money.

Second, if you don't have a family or your family isn't able to help, consider "renting" someone else's family members.

That's what Mac Tools distributor Mike Kovoukian of Rensselaer, NY does. His wife, Linda, works an outside job but still makes time to help him. And his daughter, Marissa, helped as she could before moving out on her own. But now, Kovoukian's district manager's teenagers help him clean his truck on weekends. A baking-inclined neighbor often makes brownies and

cookies for his customers. He even had a volunteer workforce of friends and neighbors that helped him swap inventory when he changed over to a new truck a while back.

Meanwhile, many distributors like Matuk say some customers are like extended family. He's had lunch every Tuesday for years with a group of customers. And he's even been invited to customer birthday parties and weddings.

So you don't need a family for your business to be a family business.

**Q.** My wife hasn't been involved in the business much yet. But now it's grown to the point where I could use her help. Should I ask her to help? What if it doesn't work out?

**A.** "I recommend it," says Mac Tools distributor Josh Canal, whose wife, Katie, runs the back office and rides with him a couple days a week on their Fort Worth, TX area route. "We've learned a lot about working together." Josh and Katie, who met in college, have discussed some day hiring drivers and creating a multi-route operation – now there's a whole new level of "buying time!"

"There are days I think she wants to kill me, but that's life," jokes Josh about working together. Rather than homicide, I suggest you agree upfront on a trial period. If things don't work out, just go back to the way things were before. No harm done. ■

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