



Sarah earns more than her partner but would never police his spending. "I'd hate it to be the other way round."

Sarah Wilshaw-Sparkes

While being the breadwinner enabled Karyn to start a new life, businesswoman Sarah Wilshaw-Sparkes says she married her husband Tony because he accepted she would always want to have a high-powered career.

"The reason I married him was the sense I could be myself. Being a stay-at-home mother wouldn't have been me. It has worked. I've been able to pursue my career."

Tony made his "internal peace" with her being the breadwinner a long time ago, she says.

"My best bit of management was marrying my husband just before starting my MBA course. Since then I have been able to offer a very good return on the investment," she quips.

Sarah, formerly a senior executive at Boston Consulting Group, is a busy freelance strategic consultant who specialises in the consumer and retail sectors. She works almost full time and also manages the women's networking website, Professionelle.co.nz, with business partner Galia BarHava-Monteith.

Her high-earning jobs have allowed Tony to work in a number of occupations, from builder to diving instructor. He's currently running a sales promotion business from

home and he manages the business around the children, 12-year-old Chloe and Tom, 10.

Sarah travels a lot for work all over Asia. "Even if it's Petone, you are out of town for four days; you're needing someone to pick up the slack."

Meanwhile, Sarah is sensitive to Tony's needs and would never monitor his spending. "Any time he wants to get something I try to be supportive because I'd hate it to be the other way round. The fact I'm earning more in absolute dollars does not take away from the contribution he is making.

"He's always worked very hard but does not bring in huge amounts of money. It's important that he's making the effort, that he's doing what he wants to do." □

Gill South has just written *Because We're Worth It*, a guide for working mothers, published by Penguin NZ.

Make it work

Wellington-based family and relationships expert Rhonda Pritchard has some practical tips for women who become the breadwinner:

1 Think through your decision. Make sure your partner asks, "Are you willing to support me for a while?" Don't let them assume that you'll support them. You are allowed to say no.

2 Communication is key. Set a timeline and arrange it so the door is open for a swap-over between partners at some stage. Don't just let the arrangement run on without review.

3 Be careful in the way you talk about your earning capability as it relates to the family finances. Being at home with the kids is unpaid work and should be regarded as such by both partners.

4 If it is not a wholehearted choice, for instance if he has lost his job or she earns so much more money, you need to discuss the circumstances. How do you each feel about them and how long they should go on for?

5 If a partner is training to improve themselves and their prospects, and doing all they can to reach that next stage, then support them. Talk about how it can be their turn to do the earning next time.

6 Role-sharing can be good but it can upset some of the dynamics of the relationship. The male is traditionally protector and initiator. It's right in principle to role-share but it can have unforeseen consequences. Be sensitive to this. Remember there is still a stigma associated with unemployment for men. It can undermine their confidence.