



Married to your job?

Sally Brown reveals how to maintain healthy, happy relationships when you are a frequent traveller

When you took your wedding vows, chances are you didn't promise to "love, honour and fly off to another country, leaving your partner to cope on their own, on a regular basis".

Yet, that's the reality of family life when your job demands frequent travel. According to our 2014 reader survey, the average *Business Traveller* reader spends 56 nights a year in hotels on business. That's an awful lot of time away from home.

For some people, absence makes the heart grow fonder. Comedian Bob Hope ascribed his successful 69-year marriage to his only spending ten years of it at home, but for others it can necessitate a split personality. Each partner must be self-sufficient and self-contained when alone, yet flexible and open enough to work as a couple when together.

It's a juggling act that's challenging, no matter how successful or financially secure you are, as actor Damian Lewis admitted in a recent interview when talking about time away from his wife,

fellow actor Helen McCrory: "Helen and I are strong, independent people and you become single very quickly again. She soon feels like a single mum if I'm away for a period of time. I feel like a single man. It's disconcerting. So coming back, you're keen for it to just take off exactly where it left off. It never does, it's never that smooth, and there is no shorthand or short cut."

SEPARATION ANXIETY

Being apart can create a level of stress in couples that they may not be aware of, according to a 2008 study from the University of Utah. Social psychologist Lisa Diamond looked into the effects of frequent, employment-based separation on a relationship and found minor withdrawal-like symptoms, such as irritability and sleep disturbances, along with an increase in the stress hormone cortisol in partners after they were separated for four to seven days.

Participants who reported high anxiety about their relationships had the biggest spikes in cortisol levels, but even those who reported low levels of stress

and anxiety showed some degree of increased cortisol and related symptoms.

Many parents also battle with guilt at being away from their children. When the former chief financial officer of Uber, Brent Callinicos, resigned recently, he said: "It is time to do what I have desired for a very long time: to keep a promise to my wife of not missing another school play, swim meet, or academic achievement of our daughter's childhood."

According to the latest ONS statistics, 42 per cent of marriages end, with more than 118,140 people getting divorced in 2012 in England and Wales, and almost half of divorces involving children under 16. Kingston, a contributor to our online forum (businessstraveller.com/discussion) is going through his second divorce, which he attributes to "excessive travel".

He says: "It is always difficult when travelling great distances to slot back into the family unit, which does put pressure on. Jet lag and demands on your time through time zones, when managing a global organisation, make the situation worse. I have three





wonderful children, aged 25, 22 and 16, who are balanced and adorable, but I always regret the time away from them as I strove for the corporate dollar to ensure they had things that I never had. I guess when I look back on my career I will be able to say I was successful, but at what cost?"

A HEALTHY DISTANCE?

It's not all bad news. A 2013 study published in the *Journal of Communication* found that people in relationships that involved time apart

often had stronger bonds from more constant and deeper communication than normal partnerships. "There are benefits in spending time apart on a regular basis," says relationship counsellor Andrew Marshall, author of *I Love You But I'm Not In Love With You: Seven Steps To Saving Your Relationship*. "It allows each of you to develop a sense of independence and the ability to rely on your own strengths."

Time apart can also help you to retain a degree of differentiation as a couple that can keep the chemistry alive. "Sexual

attraction is built upon being attracted to someone who is different from you," says Julienne Davis, co-author of *Stop Calling Him Honey... and Start Having Sex*. "We are attracted to those who seem elusive, who we cannot totally control and understand. It is the friction and fascination of being two separate people that keeps the fire alive."

The key to making it work is to stay flexible, Marshall says. "By necessity, at-home partners become very efficient at coping on their own but they must let go and make space for the returning

CASE STUDY

'I know he only travels if it's completely necessary'

HOLLY GARLAND, director of Garland PR, is home-based, while her husband Craig, a management consultant for KPMG, travels regularly to London and abroad for work. They live in Edinburgh with their two-year-old son Sam.

"We don't have family near, so when Craig's away, I'm solely responsible for the nursery pick-ups and drop-offs," she says. "If Sam is sick, I'm the one who takes time off. It's a lot of juggling but it's not impossible if you're organised and keep sight of your priorities."

"Sam is now getting old enough to notice when Craig's not there. He has imaginary chats with him on his toy phone and will say, 'Daddy's at the office working hard.' It's got harder for Craig to leave him so he now does as many day trips as he can – he'd rather get up at five in the morning to catch a flight than go the night before and miss out on time with Sam. When he is here, he's very hands-on."

"I'm used to dealing with the daily routine on my own but I do get more tired and have a shorter fuse at bedtime when Craig's away. There are times when I speak to him when I'm heading for bed at 10pm and he's out in London with one of our old friends and I feel a twinge of jealousy. But it's a balance – he has more freedom and flexibility but I have more time with Sam."

"Our situation works because we were together for a long time before we had Sam and Craig had to travel, so there is a lot of trust. I know Craig's priority is to be home and if he's away it's because he has to be, not because he fancies a night out or a decent night's sleep. We also know no job is forever and things will no doubt change."

TOP TIPS

DO

- Keep in close contact. According to a University of Utah study, couples who had longer daily conversations or more frequent calls, emails, text or voicemail messages reported the least change in the quality of their day-to-day interactions with their family when they travelled.
- Spend time with each child on their own before and after your trip. "Until they become teenagers, what every child wants and values more than anything is one-on-one time with a parent," says Andrew Marshall.
- Take regular holidays without the children where you can be a couple, rather than parents. As well as valuable time together, it can help partners to understand that travel can be hard.
- Have a daily meal together via Skype or Facetime if time differences allow, and talk over recent events in the same way you would if you were at home.
- Keep your sex life going – get creative with Skype and phone calls.



DON'T

- Check your smartphone when you're home with your children or partner. Give them your full attention.
- Feel obliged to bring presents home every time – occasional spontaneous, thoughtful gifts go down better than duty-free purchases.
- Feel guilty. It's the least useful of all human emotions, Marshall says. "The idea that there is one way of parenting and if you're not doing it, you're failing, is wrong. We need to move away from comparative parenting and find what works for you."

partner or they will feel excluded." He even recommends the at-home partner saves specific jobs and tasks for the returnee, so they can feel immediately involved on a practical level.

It's also important that the travelling half of the relationship stays "plugged in" to the minutiae of family life as much as they can – for example, by making sure they get the school emails as well as the at-home partner.

"Let your other half know that you value hearing the details of daily life when you're away," Marshall says. "They

can seem trivial to the stay-at-home partner, but it's the daily detail that keeps you feeling connected."

USE YOUR MILES

Don't underestimate the benefit of using your experience – plus any air miles – to organise family breaks. MrMichael, another contributor to the *businessstraveller.com* forum, suggests trips away as a couple. "MrsM and I value our time together without the kids; it lets us do what we want without having to wait until they fly the nest." ▶



Taking your other half along on a trip can also give them an insight into your world. Forum poster Alex Sing says: "I got my wife to come on several trips to experience what it involves and see that I am generally back at the hotel at 11pm and up at 7am. She now understands."

There's no doubt that most frequent travellers will do anything to minimise time spent away. "Occasionally I have to route myself on less favourable flights to get home at better times, but you do what you can to make the kids happy, right?" says forum contributor Falcon7x.

In the end, time apart can keep your relationship intact. According to one study, when partners were separated by travel, the pleasure and benefit from interactions went down, but so did opportunities for arguing.

As another online poster, Stevescoots, says, echoing Bob Hope: "I think that after 26 years of marriage, if I had been home every night we would most definitely have called it a day or killed each other. It has been a positive." ■

CASE STUDY

'When I start to feel detached from my family's daily life, I know that's when it's time to take a break'

GERRY BRENNAN is founder and chief executive of Cloud Booking, a supplier of room booking and space management software. In 2014, he became CEO of the Taymount Clinic in Hertfordshire, which is one of the world's leading innovators in research on the microflora of the human gut. He has been married to Claire for 21 years and they have three children – Hollie, 19, Amelia, 17 and James, 11. They live in Derbyshire.

"At the moment, most of my time is spent managing two growing companies in very different markets," he says. "Travel goes with the territory as it's about linking people and events. Recently I spent time in the Bahamas, Malaysia and New York on different projects.

"Claire is the best advisor I've ever had. I value the opportunity to talk through ideas with her as I can rely on her to think about things that haven't occurred to me and have a different perspective to mine. Recently I got involved in developing a new method of proving you're over 18, and my two daughters had lots of ideas and opinions on that – we loved sitting around the kitchen table talking about it.

"My family is the centre of my world and the single-most important thing to me. I'm happiest when I'm actively involved in their lives, so I coach my son's rugby team on Sunday morning, and read my eldest daughter's uni essays before she submits them. I have a gut instinct that tells me when I'm becoming detached from the daily detail of their lives and that's when I take a break.

"Over the years I've learned that open and honest communication is the most important part of any relationship. Respecting your partner and never taking them for granted is also crucial."