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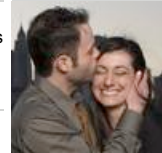
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Want your marriage to profit?

Follow 'Spousonomics' and treat it like a Fortune 500 company

By SARA STEWART

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New York is the most romantic city in the world (shut up, Paris). If you're going to fall crazy in love and get married, this is the place to do it. But if you're really in it for the long haul, you'll need to start thinking less "Moonstruck" and more "Wall Street," says a new book, "Spousonomics: Using Economics to Master Love, Marriage and Dirty Dishes."

Take Nancy Cuervo and Eric Appleton. In their carefree early years, cohabiting in a rented Boerum Hill apartment, the pair didn't pay much attention to domestic chores. "We didn't really talk much about it, like, 'I'll do this, you should do that,'" says Cuervo, 35. "As a result, not much got done."



ZANDY MANGOLD

Eric Appleton and Nancy Cuervo bickered about housework until they used economic principles such as specialization and comparative advantage.

And that was OK. But, she says, when they married and bought a place in Sunset Park, "some sort of adult gene kicked in and I really wanted to make housework a priority." At her urging, they planned to split the work right down the middle, each doing half of every job. Sensible enough, right?

"He started slipping on his end of the bargain," says Cuervo, a freelance illustrator and yoga teacher. "Not intentionally — I have more flexible hours, since he works full-time and I work from home. But the more he did that, the more I felt like we needed to talk about it. There were lots of talks."

"I wanted to help, but I wasn't available to do housework at the same time Nancy was," says 39-year-old Appleton, director of education at a nonprofit organization. "I mostly felt guilty."

What the couple needed, say the authors of "Spousonomics," was to think of their marriage in financial terms.

"Economics is the study of the allocation of resources," says co-author Jenny Anderson, a reporter who has covered the financial industry. "And in your marriage you have a very finite number of resources — limited time, energy, money, love."

"And patience," adds co-author Paula

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Szuchman, a business news journalist.

"A lot of marriage is figuring out the allocation of those things," Anderson says, "and fighting over what feels like an imbalance to each person."

In Cuervo and Appleton's case, there were two financial concepts that applied to solving their problem. First was "specialization" — what chores were they each best suited for? — and second was "comparative advantage." How could they streamline the chore system so they could maximize their free time?

"In every company, everybody has their role, what they're good at," Szuchman says. "Not everybody can do everything, because that would be completely inefficient. So the way businesses operate is through specialization."

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