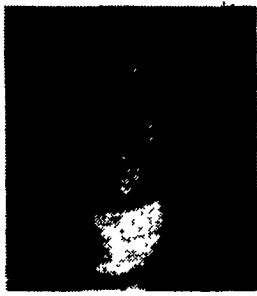


TAKING TIME

by Rebecca Wolf

Extension Home Economist



Time Out With Your Spouse

I hope last week's holiday was a pleasant reminder of the special relationship you and your spouse have. February 14th is an excuse to express love and concern with a touch of romance — a forgotten quality in many of our lives. While you're still in the mood, let me encourage you to take time out with your spouse on a regular basis. Don't save it for that once-a-year splurge.

In busy families we seem to balance our responsibilities by getting "things" done. We pay the bills, do the laundry, pick the kids up after practice, fix the combine. Then we devote those few spare moments to having "quality" time with the children. By then, the last

hour of the day has ticked away, and we're exhausted. It's easy in mid-life to neglect your relationship with your spouse. Husbands and wives too frequently take a back seat to urgent issues — the dentist appointment, dirty socks, a telephone sales call. Unfortunately, this neglect takes its toll on marriages. Researchers estimate that for people born between 1950 and 1960, 33 to 40 percent of their first marriages will end in divorce, and when marriages suffer, businesses suffer, children suffer, communities suffer.

Why does this happen? Couples spend concentrated amounts of time together in the early stages of a relationship, but after marriage and particularly after children this

changes. Those who knew their partners intimately four, ten, twenty-three years ago may no longer recognize the person with whom they share their home. People, interests, concerns, and pressures all change over time. With those personal changes come changes in relationships and patterns of communication.

In the middle of this change, marriages can thrive when partners give each other time while allowing each other the freedom to follow individual interests. Maintaining intimacy and fostering mutual respect is a challenge.

In these days and months following Valentine's Day, try some ideas to nurture your marriage and your spouse.

While on break at work or while waiting for an appointment, make a list of some of the things you value in your relationship with your husband or wife. Note personal traits of your partner that are special to you. What has your partner done that you especially like? What do you enjoy doing together? Compile the list on an extra deposit slip or even the back of an envelope and save it. Then find a time in the next few days to

share these ideas with your spouse. Plan a special time when you won't be interrupted. Take the phone off the hook. Put the kids to bed. Talk.

Another way to strengthen your marriage is to pull out that old box of pictures and memorabilia from your "courting" days. Without discussing your choice with your partner, pick out three pictures or items you'd most like to save. When you've both made your decision, tell each other why the ones chosen were particularly special. Then turn your focus to the recent past. Think of one or two ways your partner has helped you do something you especially wanted to do — one way that he or she supported you. This could be something you did just for the fun of it, to learn something new, or to meet the needs of others.

Combine your time together with some healthy exercise. Take a walk around your neighborhood or along your property in the evening.

Occasionally plan an evening

alone. If you need to, hire a babysitter, but try to avoid spending money on other things. The point is not to lavish your husband or wife with gifts but to have a mini-reunion of sorts. Use this time to talk about both positive and negative aspects of your lives together.

How do each of you feel about the time you spend at your work, talking together, with family, for sex and affection, doing home tasks?

How do you feel about the time your spouse spends working? How would you rate the following: talking together, fun times together, time with family, sex/affection? Outstanding? Satisfying? Needs work?

Strong marriages don't just happen naturally. They require both partners to work at an ever-changing relationship. As your family changes and as the seasons change, take time out with your spouse. Keep the lines of communication open and build your relationship on more than a Valentine's Day ritual.

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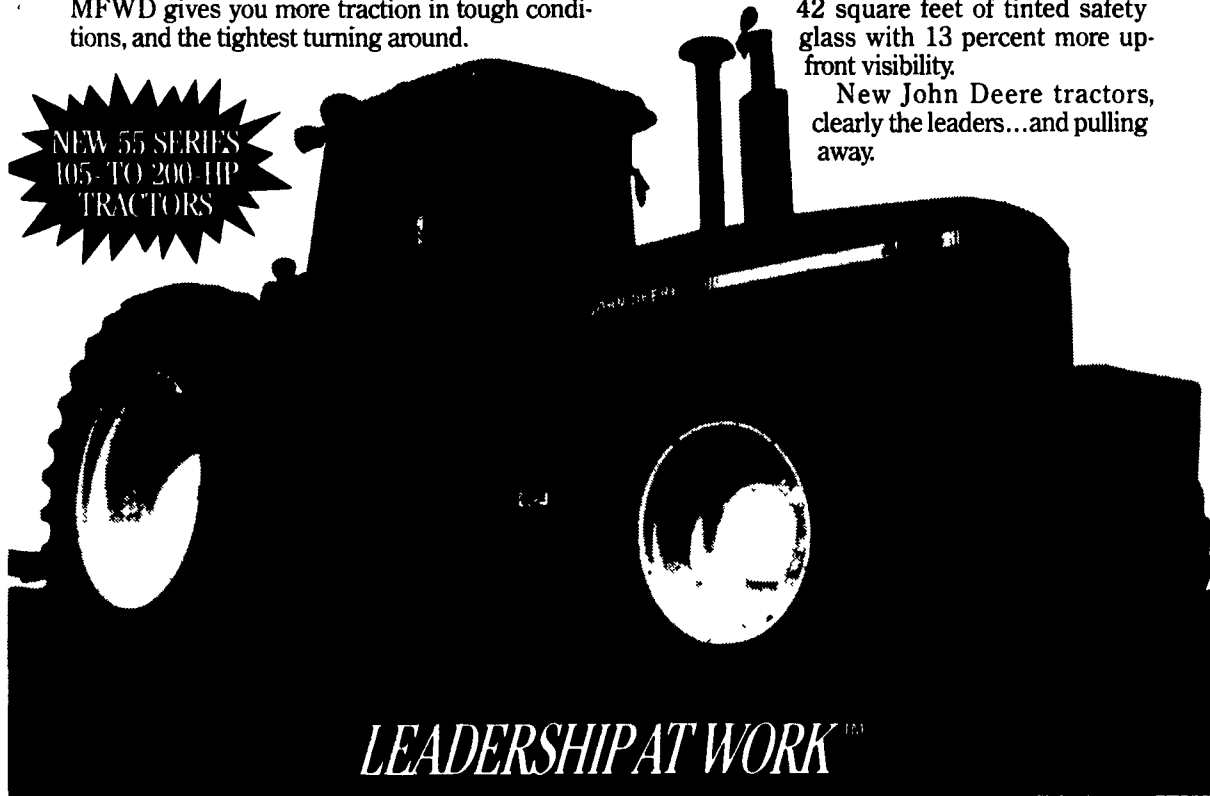
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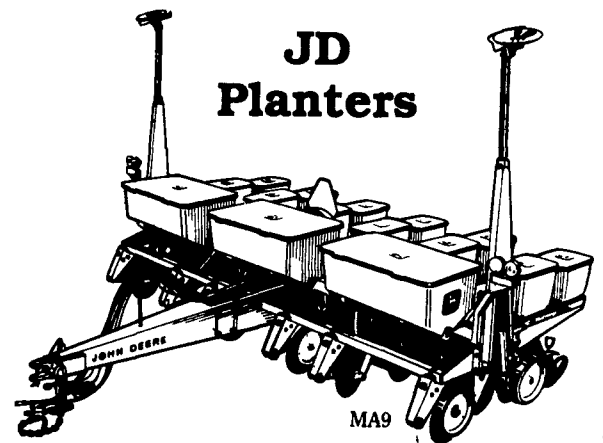
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