

Stephen Howard-Sarin



## Mr. Holland's onus, Or: How to deal with an out-of-work wife

Saloni Howard-Sarin's husband

Spends his days at ZDNet

[Wednesday, March 13, 2002](#)

Some women can bring home the bacon and fry it up in a pan. Others tell you to pick up the rashers on the way home from work, because they're working on *a novel*. Sure, sure: finding a job is on their To-Do lists--but you may spend a good long time waiting for that line to be crossed out. In the meantime you've got to adjust to life as The Sole Breadwinner. Here's how:

**EMBRACE GENDER STEREOTYPES.** No matter how competent, progressive, or sharp-as-a-tack your wife was in the working world, once she quits you become Ward Cleaver and she becomes June. You start getting dressed first in the morning. She starts planning the laundry. Your day is filled with one thing: a job. Hers is a cornucopia of going places and doing things. Common household chores you both might've ignored previously start to fester like Lady Macbeth's spot if left undone.

And the critical change: you arrive home tired at the end of the day, and she needs to talk.

**BE CHATTY.** The day is long, and you spent it gabbing with fascinating bankers and bank hangers-on. She, meanwhile, surfed the Net, avoided writing the novel, and actually started reading her spam. As you come through the door in the evening, be ready to compensate for her suddenly silent time at home *and* the dull-witted conversationalists at the tennis court. (It helps to subscribe secretly to *People* magazine, and get it delivered at the office.)

But when you do start talking, you must be careful. Very careful.

**NEVER SAY THESE 3 THINGS:** There's a new playbook for the stay-at-home wife, and you need to read it to avoid giving offense. Here are the three phrases that will get you in hot water.

- **"What do you need this money for again?"** You might have been able to ask this before the paycheck stopped arriving, but forget about it now. No formerly-professional woman likes the feel of the financial leash, and this phrase will yank her chain.
- **"No, I can't <fill in the blank> today. I'm too busy."** As the hours stretch from 9 to 5, she'll inevitably start doing more of the chores. To compensate, you must be willing to do any odd job at a moment's notice. To decline is to invite a doomed comparison over whose time is more valuable. This usually ends in tears and dirty laundry for a few days.
- **"So how's the job hunt?"** Like a verbal Chinese Water Torture, this phrase will ping her on the forehead again and again, slowly driving her mad. Well-meaning friends and relatives will say it; she'll be asking it of herself every day. Do not contribute a drop. If she's not looking for a job, you are gracefully--silently--supportive. And after she starts looking, she'll probably bring up the subject before signing the next offer letter.

**How's the whole wife-at-home thing working out, Dave? [Drop me a line!](#)**

[← PREVIOUS STORY](#)
[NEXT STORY →](#)

Talkback: [Post your comment here](#)

[Re: Why, yes, I \\*am\\* free this afternoon](#) Ms. Leisure Time

[Re: Sure, I can pick that up for you, honey](#) Ms. Leisure Time

[Re: Start working on my serve, and there goes the day!](#) Ms. Leisure Time

[ANCHORDESK HOME](#)
[← PREVIOUS STORY](#)
[→ NEXT STORY](#)

### SUBSCRIBE



AnchorDesk's expert analysis and advice delivered daily

[Sign Me Up](#)
[▶ See a sample issue](#)

### NEED HELP?

[Copy-editing Help Center](#)  
[NaNoWriMo Center](#)  
[Watching TV](#)

### TODAY ON ANCHORDESK

- ▶ [Truth Wins Out: CC can spel, I can't. Here's wy](#)
- ▶ [The inside scoop: The REAL reason CC is leaving CNET](#)
- ▶ [CC leaves CNET... All mourn her parting... Monument erected in her honor...](#)
- ▶ [Read the damn column. Don't just look at the cute face!](#)
- ▶ [Need help writing that novel, CC? Try this killer download](#)

### SHAMELESS PLUG

#### AnchorDesk Radio

Catch AnchorDesk on air, every day! You've got the time, after all. Tune in to [CNET Radio](#) Monday-Friday from noon to 1 p.m. PT for David Coursey (remember him?) and his unique, opinionated ideas on technology. Don't miss it! He can tell if you're listening!

### SECTIONS

- ▶ [Home](#)
- ▶ [Week in Review](#)
- ▶ [Columnist Archive](#)

### SEARCH FOR


[E-MAIL THIS!](#)

[PRINT THIS!](#)