

How to Be an Ally to Women Entrepreneurs in a Male-Dominated World

Women face particular challenges in the start-up world. Their spouses and partners can play an important role in supporting their ambitions.



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The start-up journey [is rough](#) for almost everyone. But it can be particularly difficult for [women entrepreneurs](#).

[The statistics](#) are pretty grim: Only [30 percent of businesses](#) worldwide are led by women. In 2017, a pitiful [2 percent of venture capital investment](#) went to female founders.

On top of that are the many disturbing stories of [sexual misconduct](#) that have come flooding out of Silicon Valley. Much of the start-up world retains a [male-dominated culture](#) that does not appropriately respect women or invite them to the table.

If you are the spouse or significant other of a female entrepreneur, you are on the front lines with her as she fights for her vision and her business, and fights against sexism. Your role as a supporter is critical.

Based on interviews with a number of female entrepreneurs, here are 4 practical ways in which their spouses and partners can stand with them:

1. Be a visible, vocal supporter.

Women entrepreneurs often have to deal with far more naysayers than male entrepreneurs do. When necessary and appropriate, spouses can step in as public advocates.

One female CEO was regularly mocked and derided by potential investors. They questioned her decision to start a business as a mom, and refused to believe she could answer technical questions about her product.

When her husband joined the company, he began attending the investor meetings. He helped with the pitch, but he also made sure to defer to his wife's role and expertise as the CEO.

I know of other spouses who eagerly tout their wives' companies and accomplishments on social media and in their own professional circles. They show up at key business functions. They express their support to anyone who will listen.

They are telling their entrepreneurs--and the rest of the world--that they wholeheartedly believe in them.

2. Take on the role of lead parent and household manager.

Even in two-income households, women still tend to do [the majority of housework and childcare](#). But when men are willing to [take the lead on managing the kids](#) and the home, they create space for their wives to flourish in their entrepreneurial careers.

This may require putting some firm boundaries around your own work schedule or even temporarily putting your career on hold.

The husband of entrepreneur Bridget Sampson transitioned much of the day-to-day operations of his own business to someone else so he could focus on their children. Bridget could then grow her consulting company, and her husband had valuable bonding time with their kids.

When Julie Burleson was scaling up her cooking school for kids, her husband retired from his job to care for their school-aged children. Though she missed spending time with her family, Julie now sees how her entrepreneurial passion helped instill in her kids a determination to do work that they love.

The sacrifices made by these spouses are significant, but they're no different from the sacrifices that wives have been making for their husbands for many years. And the potential benefits of this decision for your partner, her business, and your family are immeasurable.

3. Ask others for help.

If it's not possible for you to help out more at home, then work together with your entrepreneur-spouse to figure out how you can get help. Which tasks require the most time or cause your entrepreneur the most stress? How can family members, friends, or paid professionals step in, allowing her to dedicate more time to her business?

Asking for help can feel risky, but more often than not, those you ask will respond generously. That's what entrepreneur Jaynée Howe, who develops educational apps for kids, found. "You'd be surprised how many people are thrilled that you're asking for help," she shared with me.

Building a community of people around you who are actively supporting your careers will alleviate logistical stresses and provide some relief from [the loneliness that often plagues founders](#).

4. Be an ally for professional women.

When individual women are given more and better professional opportunities, that can open the pathway for even more women. If you yourself are an employer or manager, prioritize the hiring of women. Do what you can to ensure that your female colleagues are receiving mentoring, professional development, and equal pay.

In business and in your daily life, support female-owned businesses in the decisions you make. Chances are that these kindnesses will one day come back to benefit your female entrepreneur, or the up-and-coming female entrepreneurs in your family.