

editorial opinion



Coping with solo life

The challenges which show up almost immediately after losing a spouse through death or divorce fall into two major areas—changes within you as a person and changes in responsibilities. All the tasks which husband and wife once shared now belong to one person. All of the social activities built around partners are now solo.

It is a change from a partnership arrangement to a sole proprietorship. A woman used to running the home may find she also has to run a business or work, take care of settling an estate or the details of a divorce and adapt herself socially to being a single.

The man may find that while he continues his career, he is also cooking, cleaning, wrestling with the laundry and lining up babysitters while gearing himself to finding some kind of social life.

If this double load of responsibilities seems overwhelming, initially, the worry is justified.

How many times in the distant past do you recall saying "You call the plumber, you can make him understand better than I can," or "You call and complain, I always cry?"

And how often do you remember remarking "Listen, don't worry, I'll take care of it," or "I already called and it's all settled?"

Now, all problems, responsibilities and decisions fall on one set of shoulders and the weight is often oppressive.

This could be the time to psych your-

self for the new sole proprietor role.

Believing you can do it eases the burden.

In a radio interview a number of years ago, Phyllis Diller told how a book, "The Magic of Believing," changed her life. The comedienne, who has made thousands of dollars and friends looking ridiculous and playing the fool, was once afraid to get on a plane, cross the Golden Gate bridge or step out of the house, much less speak up in public.

Gundella, Michigan's best known witch, echoes this sentiment in writing and public appearances.

"You can do anything you believe you can do."

This lady, all 200-plus pounds of her, claims to be able to charm men right out of their shoes. A couple of stocking-footed guys are willing to testify to her feminine powers.

Norman Vincent Peale and his popular book, "The Power of Positive Thinking," takes a different approach to the same philosophy.

VISUALIZE YOURSELF handling problems, working your way through the maze. Actually sit down and form a mental picture of you coping with the problems before you. See yourself cooking or cleaning, meeting new friends, making phone calls you once dodged, keeping family accounts or training for a new job.

After all, what do you have to lose but a little fear of the unknown?

Pros and cons weighed of Hartsock's protest

Farmington Councilman Bill Hartsock was out of line when he abstained on the council's vote for mayor as a protest against the selection system.

His duty as a councilman was to help elect the mayor. If he doesn't like the system, his recourse is to seek a charter amendment.

Yet Farmington's city charter has a lot of merit just the way it is. It provides for a city manager administration and a mayor who is picked by the council and serves essentially as "chairman of the board" and ceremonial chief.

HARTSOCK SUGGESTS the top finisher in the council race become the mayor, which has the effect of putting the decision in the people's hands.

The idea is not without merit. Kalamazoo does it that way. In practice, the mayor there is generally a third-term councilman. Detroit's council president, whose job is analogous to the mayor's in a city manager system like Farmington's, is whoever finishes first in the council race. That person has also tended to be a second- or third-term veteran.

Farmington would have difficulty implementing such a system, however, because its councilmen are elected for staggered terms. Who should be mayor—the first-place finisher of 1975 or the first-place finisher of 1973?

THERE ARE SOME genuine disadvantages to the Kalamazoo and Detroit systems of letting the popular vote designate the leader.

In Farmington, the mayor is essentially a council officer, rather than an administrator. It's logical, therefore, to let the council choose its own officer.

Being a chairman requires special qualities. A person who's a first class legislator may not be the type who would make a good chairman. In Westland, Councilperson Justine Barns has consistently finished first on election day and has been consistently been denied the presidency by her fellow councilmen—with reason.

Sometimes the first-place finisher in a council election is a good guy who has never offended anybody whereas experienced councilmen of strong views finish lower because they've made enemies. Should the good guy who has never offended anybody automatically become mayor because of the popular vote?

A mayor is often called on to perform ceremonial duties: Riding in parades, awarding Boy Scout eagle badges, cutting ribbons for new stores and factories. These duties take time.

Not every councilman would either want to be mayor or have the time. If so, he should have the option of declining the honor. He wouldn't have that option under a city charter that automatically made the first-place candidate mayor, and Farmington's ceremonial performances might suffer—a minor loss, surely, but worth considering.

ONE THING Farmington should not even consider, however, is an independently elected mayor—not when it has the city manager form of government.

Farmington's city charter is an excellent one because it has clean lines of authority, making the city manager the chief administrative officer and setting up a purely legislative council.

But if a city elects a mayor independently and has a city manager, too, those lines of authority can get muddy. People begin taking administrative problems to the mayor instead of to the city manager. And an independent mayor often can't resist the temptation to meddle in administration.

Ann Arbor has had some problems because it has both a city administrator (the equivalent of a manager) and an independent mayor, and Garden City is probably going to have similar problems under its new charter, which provides for both an independent mayor and a city manager.

HARTSOCK AND my distinguished editorial colleague, Steve Barnaby, are on sound ground when they complain of the club-like, buddy-buddy atmosphere in which the Farmington City Council works. It probably wouldn't hurt the town if the council were a little more open.

That's a common characteristic in small cities. There may be no way a charter can amend it.

Yet on balance, of the dozens of city councils, township boards, village councils, school boards, college boards, university boards, county commissions, two houses of the Michigan Legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives that this working newsman has covered, the City of Farmington's council has got to be in the top 10 per cent. Its charter is excellent by the standards of political science. And the delivery of services by the manager is efficient and open.

This observer has a hunch that even if the system is re-examined, it will pass the test.

TIM RICHARD



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