

# Advice for Executive Mates, From One to Another

CEO's wife forms company ExecuMate to offer advice to spouses of corporate executives

By **JAMIE STENGLE** Associated Press Writer  
DALLAS September 2, 2009 (AP)

As her husband climbed the corporate ladder, Colette Young noticed that many other executive spouses were looking for advice: What's appropriate to wear to a corporate function? How should they deal with a spouse who's tied to a BlackBerry?

So Young, the wife of 20 years of Dr Pepper Snapple Group chief executive Larry Young, formed a business. As her brochure puts it: "At ExecuMate we strive to help executives be incredibly successful. We believe a supportive, engaged spouse can contribute greatly to that success and ultimately to the overall success of the company, too."

Young's had a handful of speaking engagements since forming ExecuMate last year, touching on points like balancing life and work, attitude and communication. And she's offered one-on-one mentoring to about 10 people, priced from a single session at \$300 per hour to ongoing contracts for \$15,000 to \$20,000.

"As a spouse, the first thing you need to be is accountable for yourself, your home," Young said.

"You're like the CEO of your home, even if you both have careers. You just need to be accountable for your emotions and your family and your future." The advice is for any corporate spouse, and Young says she has counseled some men, though she finds most are still women. Her counsel includes reminding spouses to have a positive attitude about career moves that include relocating, and being understanding when a spouse works long days, comes home exhausted and never puts down their electronic device.

"As a spouse, you can't say 'Put that BlackBerry away.' You have to know part of that life is they're on 24/7," Young said.



Colette C. Young, wife of Dr. Pepper Snapple CEO, talks about her new business that provides coaching, mentoring, and support to executive spouses. (AP Photo/Donna McWilliam)

To some, advice on how to be a good corporate spouse seems antiquated.

Warren Bennis, a business administration professor at the University of Southern California, said that wives today are likely to have their own careers as well, and their role as corporate spouse will mostly consist of attending a few social functions.

"My reaction is it's a very old-fashioned notion that somehow the CEO and wife are tethered," Bennis said. "I think that today they're more untethered than ever before."

But others say there's a practical side.

Betsy Gelb, a professor in the Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston, said no one would think it was strange to take a class in negotiation or home repair, so why not get some pointers on being married to an executive?

Young says that many corporate spouses do have their own careers, but she wants to remind those who don't to hold on to whatever it is they like to do.



"I really believe they need to know themselves and find their passion. They are not just a wife," said Young, 53, who has bachelor's and master's degrees in music education and postgraduate training in music and counseling.

By the time she married Larry Young at the age of 33, Colette Young had already been teaching school, playing piano and singing at events and had a song-writing business in Missouri. Four years after they were married, his career took them to Poland, then Chicago, Minneapolis and now Dallas.

When she couldn't find a teaching position in Chicago, Young turned her focus to their home's unfinished basement, finding that she enjoyed renovation. The pianist and vocalist has also kept up her music and developed a new love of golf.

In addition to teaching "ExecuMate" skills, Young also offers a variety of speeches including one to single men called "Looking for an ExecuMate." So far, most of her speeches have been to nonprofits and in the educational sector, but she has some speaking engagements booked with corporations in the fall, priced from \$5,000 to \$15,000.

Rosanna Hertz, a professor of sociology and women's studies at Wellesley College, said that one of the reasons married men have been attractive to the corporate world is that they bring with them wives who can become active in the community, which may bring in clients.

Hertz said that Young seems to be trying to create a niche for the modern corporate wife, making her importance more visible than it was in the past.

"It's a modern twist on what was an antiquated role for women," said Hertz, who added that it's difficult for a woman married to a top executive to have a career herself, especially if they have children.



But Bettina Aptheker, a professor of feminist studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, questions whether any amount of advice — however helpful — can add meaning to one's life. She says that women, especially those who aren't in a profession they like, have struggled for generations to give meaning to their lives.

"She's dealing with a very old problem," Aptheker said. "And she's probably very helpful. But it is not a solution because no one can live their lives through another person. ... This woman is trying to make the best, give other women tools in what is a very unsatisfactory position to be in."

Young doesn't see it that way. And neither does Jennifer McMichael, the wife of an area vice president at Dr Pepper, who said that she has found fulfillment in the role of executive spouse and has been impressed with Young's cheery attitude.

"I have so much peace and happiness in my life," said McMichael, 40, of Frisco, who has a blended family of five boys ages 12 to 17 and works part-time as a pediatric dental assistant. "I don't feel like I'm a lesser half to the whole because I don't travel and have a corporate job."

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On the Net:

ExecuMate: <http://www.execumate.net>