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Gold Award for Excellence in Magazine Design (IFRA 2004)

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MY SISTER, MY BOSS
WORKING WITH A PARENT, SIBLING OR SPOUSE

hooray
for
holidays!





Ernest Rex Tan and His wife Grace Chong make a sparkling smile their business.

Dr Tan, and the way her husband sits just a few inches away – like how colleagues would behave, one might say.

The Tans say they don't go out of their way to act business-like with each other, but they don't bring their personal baggage to work. According to them, it isn't difficult to settle any differences between them, because they are "mature enough to admit when the other has the better idea".

Business talk often spills over to their dining table, but the couple say they discuss work only after their son goes to bed.

The best part about working together, the Tans point out, is being able to share the same lifestyle.

Grace says: "Who knows his job better than I do? If he has to cancel a lunch appointment because of a client, I would understand. But a wife who doesn't work with her husband

and doesn't know his schedule might not."

Contrary to common perception, the Tans don't get to see each other all the time as they have their own schedules. Now that Grace is working from home more often – so she can devote more time to their son – the couple find that it has become even more necessary for them to talk business at home.

Grace embarked on the home-office arrangement after she suffered a slipped disc following her son's birth. It was made possible thanks to technological support such as e-mail, and video conferencing, she says.

But Grace received a far more important form of support from her husband, who not only covered her daily duties at work but also took over their baby's night feeds. It was especially tiring for him during the three-month period when the Tans didn't have a domestic helper, because they couldn't get one at the last minute.

But Dr Tan took all of it in his stride. He says: "I hardly slept but it honestly didn't matter. It was just something that needed to be done. I'm her business partner as well as her husband, so I definitely want to give her as much support as I can. I'm sure she would have done the same for me."

*smile inc

A COSMETIC DENTAL PRACTICE, STARTED BY A HUSBAND-AND-WIFE TEAM.

Dr Ernest Rex Tan and his wife, Grace Chong-Tan, decided to take the plunge into the business world even before they tied the knot.

Dr Tan says: "Each of us has our own strengths that complement one another. So, we thought, why not combine them and become a powerful brand?"

That brand, Smile Inc, is now on the lips of everyone who wishes to get a set of pearly whites. Dr Tan provides the dental expertise, while his wife, formerly a Singapore Tourism Board executive, looks after the business side.

The couple, who are in their 30s, opened their outlets at Forum and Suntec City in 1997. In between, they got hitched and now have a five-year-old son named Matthew Scott.

Even though the Tans work side by side, there is neither a hint of office romance nor cold war to be felt in the air. Perhaps it's the way Grace addresses her husband casually as