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Printed from ChicagoBusiness.com

Resolved: Find work-life balance in the family business

By: Sandra Swanson January 07, 2012

JACQUI MCGREW, 34, CHRIS MCGREW, 45, BRIAN POWERS, 54, Hoodz International LLC franchisees ■ **Town:** Naperville, Chicago ■ **Year founded:** West and southwest metro franchise launched in 2010, downtown Chicago franchise in 2011 ■ **2011 sales:** \$250,000-\$500,000 ■ **Employees:** 12

As local franchise owners for Hoodz International, an Ann Arbor, Mich.-based commercial kitchen exhaust-cleaning service, these entrepreneurs want to reinforce the lines between work and family lives. That's no easy task, considering Jacqui McGrew and Chris McGrew are married, and Brian Powers is Ms. McGrew's father. Ms. McGrew's mother, Carol Powers, 53, is office manager, and Ms. McGrew's brothers also work for the company (Brian Powers Jr., 30, as general manager, and Steven Powers, 26, as an inspector). "We feel that it is our strength in numbers that has helped elevate us to the top 10% of our national franchise network," Brian Powers says.

One weakness, though, is the inclination to talk about work at all hours. "As an evening progresses, one person may still have business on their mind," Ms. McGrew says. "However, if the other person has moved on to the latest episode of 'The Good Wife' and a glass of wine, the conversation is less likely to end well."

They've found conversations during business hours (roughly 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.) are more productive, so they're aiming to limit shoptalk to that window. They also have applied to join the University of Illinois at Chicago Family Business Council and hope to glean insights from the forums and training programs. "We believe that nurturing the relationships we hold dear to us will help drive the success of the business itself," Ms. McGrew says.

AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE: It's unrealistic to make work discussions off-limits after certain hours, says Jonathan Pure, 34. He is president of Pure's Food Specialties Inc., with 2011 sales of \$15 million, and runs the Broadview company with his father and brother.

"I could be at home, in the middle of watching a movie with my daughter, but I'll still take a three-minute phone call for a problem that needs a resolution," he says. Business discussions sometimes come up at holidays—usually later in the evening, after a glass of wine.

But there's an unwritten rule about those talks. "They're not 'putting-out-fires' discussions. They focus on the big picture of the company, and those are enjoyable conversations to have," he says.