



# ASPEN FAMILY BUSINESS GROUP, LLC

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DEEP RELATIONSHIPS. ENDURING LEGACIES.

Addiction: It's All in the Family (Firm)

by Doug Lyons

Having treated hundreds of family business leaders, we have witnessed the immeasurable harm that untreated addiction does to the family, the firm and to relationships among a vast array of stakeholders.

The good news is intervention, treatment and ongoing management of the disease is highly effective. Physicians and pilots recover at rates of over 90%. By applying the same intervention, treatment and aftercare plans followed by pilots and physicians, we can approximate similar recovery rates for family business members.

But too often the family business waits too long to address it, either because the individual in need of help is a founder, a big producer or someone the family has deemed too touchy to approach. Intervention can never be too early and it is never too late to try to help.

It is essential to understand that addiction is not a moral failing nor is it the result of a lack of will power; it is a brain disease. In the last 10 years, our understanding of the disease has grown by leaps and bounds. The advent of advanced imaging technologies such as Functional MRI's demonstrate the significant adaptations that occur in the brain after repeated exposure to exogenous (drugs originating from the outside, including alcohol) and endogenous (naturally occurring dopamine / serotonin) chemicals.

Addiction is a re-regulation of the brain's reward system activated, reinforced and sustained via dopamine release. Those who continue to bombard the brain with dopamine are at risk of re-wiring it (referred to as neuroplasticity) and of suffering the consequences of losing control over alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, spending, or a variety of other processes. For those genetically predisposed to addiction, dopamine reward is even more risky.

The good news is that treatment outcomes for family business members can be tailored to meet the very demanding and exacting requirements that pilots and

physicians must meet thereby increasing success rates and bringing the addicted individual and the family firm back to a place of balance and well being.

When the disease is managed as a chronic illness and **not** an acute event, brains can heal and so can relationships, families and family business units.

If you recognize or suspect someone in your family/firm has an addiction disorder, consult with a specialist. Don't try to go it alone. You would not run your business without a CEO or CFO, so don't try to solve something as complex as addiction without the proper guidance and expertise.

Your best resource will have an extensive history working with family firms and "alpha" personalities. For family business members, a good resource will recognize the family firm as a client and will work with the family business system not just the "identified sick person." Addiction takes a toll on all who encounter it. Make sure you have a process to debrief and establish new norms thereby creating a higher functioning workplace and family business.