



# ASPEN FAMILY BUSINESS GROUP, LLC

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DEEP RELATIONSHIPS. ENDURING LEGACIES.

## Holding Your Own During the Holidays

by Leslie Dashew

There's an old story about a woman who walks into her parents' home with her husband at age forty on Thanksgiving. She walks into the dining room and she is 30; she walks into the kitchen and she's in her 20s and her mom is telling her how to cook.

She walks into the bedroom and is a teenager again and can't imagine sleeping with someone in her parents house (even though she's now really a grown married woman about to sleep with her own husband!) She gets into the den with her brothers and they all start teasing each other just like young kids.

Somehow when we get around our families, especially during the holidays, we regress to our "growing up" roles, rather than relating as one adult to another. We are pulled back like gravity to a less mature, less differentiated self.

Differentiation is the concept that means we have a clear sense of our selves, our values and our boundaries and that sense of self is pretty consistent no matter where we are or with whom we find our selves.

But with the tug backward for our "mature, differentiated" self around family, our coping skills can decrease as well: we become more sensitive to teasing or slights; we are more concerned about getting recognition or credit and that everything is "fair."

So as you prepare to visit home or visit family over the holidays, prepare yourself for the potential "gravity" of the situation and hold your own sense of self. Some tips include:

1. In advance, think about the way you want to relate to the family members you will see and what is most important to you in that connection.
2. Be prepared to preempt the old patterns by starting conversations or interactions the way you would like them to be.
3. Enlist an ally who can give you a tug or a cue if he or she sees you start to react inappropriately so you can catch yourself before it goes too far.

4. Pre-negotiate some situations, for instance discuss the fact you would like to try making a pie a different way than your mom does it and see if she would support this “experiment” rather than waiting for her to correct the way you are doing it.
5. Take “time-outs” when you feel you are being seduced into old behavior, go regain your composure. Do some activities you enjoy with others in the group with whom you relate in an adult-adult fashion.
6. Especially for families in business, it is helpful to have a “no business” ground rule for periods of time so that everyone can relate as family.

New Year's is often a time for new resolutions. The entire holiday season can be one of resolving to relate constructively and maturely. When we are calm and mature we respond that way to one another, when we are immature or anxious, we often react in a way that is not the way we would like to be. Take time to respond the way you would like...Hold on to that self!

All of us in the Aspen Family Business Group wish you and yours a joyous holiday season and a peaceful and prosperous 2010.