



ASPEN FAMILY BUSINESS GROUP, LLC

DEEP RELATIONSHIPS. ENDURING LEGACIES.

The Secret Ingredient of Flourishing Family Relationships

by Aspen Family Business Group, LLC

Families in business together face a daunting and complex set of challenges. Not only must they be able to work together to make their business successful, but they also must do so while promoting positive family feelings. The families that are successful at this share several common characteristics worth noting.

They come together as adults and have overcome the emotional baggage that sometimes accumulates during the “growing up years.” In particular, they shift away from a parent-child way of relating to one another and move to an adult-adult orientation. Parents are able to move away from needing to be “in charge,” which allows the family to connect on a more level playing field as individuals.

These families have developed the skills, trust and mutual respect necessary to openly confront and deal with sensitive issues without becoming defensive. Solving difficult and complex business problems requires open communication so the issues can be identified, confronted and every potential solution explored. Sometimes these problems are associated with a family member, which tends to inhibit candid discussions.

Perhaps a brother has developed a sorely needed marketing plan for the business but it is incomplete. Other family members hold back from confronting the issue for fear the brother will become defensive and angry. Successful families have developed constructive methods of handling these kinds of situations.

They work on effective interpersonal boundaries and are aware of the limitations of influencing anyone else’s behavior. They don’t try to “fix” others. They realize you can’t control other people and events; you can only control your reaction to them.

For instance, parents can become frustrated with the choices their older children make and may try to influence these children to make decisions more consistent with their expectations. For the success of the business and the family, parents

must realize they can offer counsel and support, but must leave it up to their child to make choices and experience the consequences.

Flourishing families recognize when a conflict is escalating and have ways of making sure a situation does not spin out of control and cause difficult to repair damage to family relationships. All too often conflicts escalate as events or discussions are misinterpreted or miscommunicated and responses are given in the heat of the moment. These types of responses are hard to take back and get over later. Ultimatums are dangerous. People get painted into a corner, emotions run high, lines in the sand are drawn and crossed and a large interpersonal rift occurs. Successful families are able to circumvent such situations to avoid long-term damage to the family and the business.

Most importantly, these families value and commit resources to spending time together celebrating the family, honoring individuals and nurturing the relationships that bind them together. Family birthdays and special events are remembered and a real effort is made to communicate regularly. Family gatherings receive a high priority. Setting time aside to reconnect, have fun and just enjoy each other's company are of the utmost importance.

Together, these all combine to keep a family positively connected through time and able to thrive through all of the difficulties and perils they are sure to encounter. To be fair, few families manage to practice these things all of the time. We are all human and we all have our moments, but successful families have a special compass that keeps them headed in the right direction and brings them back on course when things get off track.