

# **C.H.A.L.L.E.N.G.E.S. inc**

**Working with Families in Business**

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**~MARCH 2007 NEWSLETTER~**

*“It is more difficult to maintain honor than to become prosperous!”*

*- Irish Proverb*

## **EXPECTATIONS**

### ***Another frustration for Families in Business***

Why is it that most members of families in business mention “interpersonal conflict” as a major family and business challenge? Even the most loving families, who usually get along well in the business environment, mention interpersonal conflict as the leading cause of family tension. It is this conflict that creates undue stress between family members, allows for poor or no decision making in various areas of the business and in its worst form, destroys families and “sinks” businesses! What is the root of this universal Families in Business problem?

After years of working with hundreds of family businesses, we believe we have discovered the common denominator at the root of the problem. Most family members have negative expectations of one another.

First, it is important to understand that the major conflicts taking place in the family and the business can be placed into three major groups, the first being the parent and child (or children) in conflict. The second is the sibling to sibling conflict and the third is the conflict that arises between extended family members who may or may not be involved in the business. This third group can include spouses, cousins, grandparents, uncles, aunts, in-laws and every other imaginable relative.

These family business conflicts seem to stem from past personal interactions between family members or perceptions of other family members that have been handed from one family member to another through “family gossip.” The interactions and perceptions most commonly label a relative as untrustworthy, unreliable, uncaring, a poor listener, not truthful, a “hard head” and a number of other negative descriptors. These negative descriptors are stored in our emotional “bank” and called upon when we are faced with predicting how a family member will act, or fail to act, in a certain circumstance.

“I know what you were going to say about this!” “I shouldn’t have given this assignment to you because I knew you were going to screw it up!” “I know you will be late because you have never been dependable!” “No one has ever been able to trust you!” All statements that have set the expectation before the words were even spoken. It is as if the tension and conflict have been pre-determined.

How many times, in your interactions with other members of the family business, have you NOT voiced an opinion, failed to ask for help, failed to share an idea, avoided delegating or just avoided contact because of what your expectations were of the reaction you would receive from that individual? Your expectations are already predicting a behavior in another. Your whole attitude, body language etc. has already been bought into the prediction. The way you approach the individual, the way you present your request, the words you use and the body language you show already sends the negative expectation. You just set up a self-fulfilling prophecy! You are angry, at least emotionally, when you start to move toward the other individual because you have already decided that there will be confrontation. This becomes another negative expectation that you put in your negative emotional bank about this person and you haven't even talked to them yet!

Think about it. How many times do we *think our way* into a negative encounter with another family member due to preconceived negative expectations? If you are like most of us, more often than we would like to admit.

Oh I know what you are thinking, "But the other family member is really a screw up!" I wonder what would happen if we began to *expect* that they would no longer be a screw up. What if we began to expect them to be successful and do the right things? What would happen if we would take a little time and see the whole person and not just those negative expectations we have stored in our emotional bank? What would happen if we took a little more time to really get to know the positive side of others? Maybe our self-fulfilling prophecy would be something that would be positive for us and other family members.

Oh, one other question. What are the preconceived expectations others have of you? I hate to tell you but they are not all good! What are you going to do about those? That is the real *challenge*!

Why is it that those who should be the source of all our joy, our family, become the source of our biggest sorrow and frustration? Only you can change it. We can help.

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