

C.H.A.L.L.E.N.G.E.S.[®]

Working with Families in Business

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AUGUST 2008 NEWSLETTER

Rule #10

Set the Example by your Attitude, Word and Action

“The best thing to give to your enemy is forgiveness; to an opponent, tolerance; to a friend, your heart; to your child, a good example; to a father, deference; to your mother, conduct that will make her proud of you; to yourself, respect; to all men, charity.” - Francis Maitland Balfour

In China, the traditional relationship between parent and child has long been based on unconditional, reciprocal love and respect. In this type of relationship the parent asks themselves, how would I like to be treated if I were my child? The adult child will ask themselves, how would I like to be treated when I am aged and infirmed? The family relationship is based on mutual trust of the motives of one another. Both the parent and child in this type of relationship believe above all else that their parent or their children are making decisions in the best interest of one another. Unfortunately, after working with many families in business, we have found while there is a profession of love for one another the idea of unconditional, reciprocal love with complete trust in decision making is rarely present.

Are we losing something in our relationships with one another? Have many families in business lost the individual desire to share a loving and trusting kinship? A kinship that can never be broken by greed, self-serving decisions or taking “sides” with those who find comfort in “driving wedges” between family members? With so many family businesses failing due to the inability to properly address the personal and emotional needs of family members, the answer is quite evident.

Our Rule #10 is summed up beautifully by Mr. Balfour’s quote (above). If each family member took their relationship with other family members as seriously as they do the way they try to please friends, many family businesses would not be facing some of the personal crisis situations they are in now. If family members devoted as much time and effort to one another as they do on their golf game or their workout or one of a hundred other activities that come before family relationships, we may find families in business unselfish in their desires for mutual success.

Setting the example can only happen when it begins with a personal commitment to be forgiving, be tolerant, show deference, act in a way that makes our family proud, offer unconditional respect, trust and love to each family member and do it all without expecting anything in return!

Setting the example has to become more than a rule. It has to become a way of life for each member of the family business. It has to be a commitment for each family member to always positively represent the entire family in everything they do, inside and outside of the business. It is really understanding how the other family member wants to be fairly treated at whatever stage of life they are in and treating them in such a way.

We lose when we use the excuse, “they will never change!” Our first question should be, “are we willing to change to get to know them better?” But what usually happens is individual stubbornness takes over. “They won’t change, so I won’t change” and the dance of emotion continues! With these types of very real attitudes in many family businesses today, the examples given to the future generations are negative. So negative are these shared attitudes they can actually destroy any hope of unconditional, reciprocal love and trust in other family members from ever taking hold. Most of what the future generation has heard is how bad it is to work with other family members. The trouble it brings and how one family member is always trying to “do something” to another. Where is the example in those types of attitudes, words and actions?

As family businesses we are the strongest employment force in the world. It is family businesses that are the backbone of most economies and the employment of most of the work force. Yet we can be lousy at supporting our own family members. We are bad at forgiving and starting anew. We fall short devoting the necessary amount of time to really get to know our family members as the people they are today instead of remembering them as who they may have been yesterday.

Get with your family and make a renewed commitment to *set the example by your attitude, word and action*. Maybe we can take a lesson from the lives of the Chinese family. Maybe if we make it a part of our lives, fewer family businesses will fail. Maybe if we make it part of our lives individual family relationships will become stronger and there won’t be so many “emotional” issues getting in the way of family love. Try it – just see what you have to gain!

We can help families get back on track in making renewed commitments to one another. We would be honored to assist your family in business. Give us a call and let’s discover if our services are a “fit” for the needs of your family and business.

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