

C.H.A.L.L.E.N.G.E.S.[®]

Working with Families in Business

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Mother's Day

MAY 2009 NEWSLETTER

"Mother love is the fuel that enables a normal human being to do the impossible".

by: Marion C. Garretty

Question from a reader: *How can I deal with my mother?*

I am a 40 year old male who has been involved in the family business my mother founded, all my life. I worked full-time in the business every summer while attending school and became a full-time employee after graduating from college. Last year I was given the title of President. The problem is that my decisions are second-guessed and too often over-ruled by my mother. It has caused a tremendous strain in our business and is now affecting our personal relationship as well. What do I do?

Yours is a difficult situation. You may be surprised by how common inter-family stress and conflict is when transitioning the business from parent to an adult child (or children).

Let's start by helping you understand the emotions of your mom concerning this transition of power and responsibility. Most entrepreneurs have very strong emotional attachments to their businesses yet few will admit it to their children. Most started their businesses because they were unsatisfied working for someone else and/or because they were trying to find a way to "pay the bills." Over the years, these entrepreneurs guided how the business grew, changed, and matured in many different ways. They protected the business by reacting fast enough to correct mistakes when they happened as well as doing their best to keep the business safe from competitive threats. They also celebrated milestones the business achieved in ways that may or may not have been visible to others. All of these interactions create strong emotional attachments between most entrepreneurs and the business they either "gave birth to" or were responsible for "enabling it to reach levels" not thought possible. Emotional attachments are also present in most parent/child relationships. One unique difference is that many parents, like your mom, are confident (because of the experiences they have gained) they can correct most mistakes made in the business without a dramatic negative impact upon the business. They have learned how to protect the business. Your mom may fear (or be concerned) that you may make a mistake in your decisions and may not as yet gained the experience to correct it in a proper and/or timely fashion. She may also fear (or be concerned) that your mistakes or

bad decision may diminish your creditability with your employees as well as others you do business with.

There may be a “tug of war” going on within your mom between her entrepreneurial emotional need to protect and guide the company, and her mother’s emotional desire to guide you in your experiences and protect you from getting “hurt” in any way. This is an emotional struggle many parents involved in family businesses deal with but are reluctant to discuss; especially with their children.

So know that there is an understanding these emotions are present, what can you do? You have to begin with the understanding that these feelings are very real. Next, you have to realize that your mother does want you to succeed and you need to *let her help you*. You have to teach her how to have confidence in your decisions. You start doing this by remembering “No Surprises.” This means keeping her in the loop. Don’t surprise her with a major decision that you have not discussed with her. She needs to understand how you make decisions. Ask your mother for help in making decisions even though you may believe you know the answer or the right path to the correct answer. Remember your first priority is to help your mom trust your decisions as an adult.

Here is an example on how to teach her to trust your decisions as an adult: Start by asking the question, “Mom, I have an issue that needs to be addressed can I get your thoughts on it?” Then present the issue, how you think it should be handled and ask her for input on what she agrees or disagrees with (*very important to include both so you can learn her thought process as well*). Yes, sometimes she will have a totally different answer than you do and may even demand that you do it her way. Don’t get angry, just tell her in a calm way that you will support her decision and you hope one day she will support yours. Keep doing this with every decision you have to make. This is not a “cop out.” Think about what happens if you “stick to your guns” on your solution. Your mother would probably jump in, change it because she wasn’t in “the loop”, undermine your authority and likely do it in front of other employees. So which way is the most common sense way to proceed? Your way, that will most likely be changed, undermined and make you look bad, or ask for her help that won’t?

Using this technique will also enable the two of you to engage in real business conversations that will help your personal relationship as well. If you become a patient listener you will gain insight into how your mother makes decisions and you will be surprised at how helpful this can be in improving your personal and business relationship. Another benefit of this is that it will demonstrate a unified front of you and your mother to the employees and others that deal with your business. Many people that work for you may like to keep you and your mother at odds because when that happens you can’t spend as much time on them. If you choose your way, then you must realize it is your ego driving you not common sense and not much is going to change. If you commit to do what is suggested you will see a difference in how your mother will treat your business decisions. Be realistic. Do what is in the best interest of the family and the business.

Keep going to your mom for advice, keep helping her understand you as an adult and then trust how you make decisions. The more *you* do this the faster you will find that she will be less “protective” of you and *her* business. She will trust you. Soon she will turn more and more decisions over to you. Remember if when you have all the decision making authority it will never mean NOT keeping her informed of what is going on. It will not be easy but if you commit to this simple exercise of love and respect for your mother’s emotional drivers, your authority will be respected and your relationship with your mom will improve. Remember, be patient and it will happen, keep doing what you are doing and it will only get worse.

This is a great time to start. Tell your mother how much you love her and how lucky you are to have her. Tell her how thankful you are that she “let” you come into *her* business.

One other thing you must do. Make sure you wish her the happiest of Mother’s days because you would not even be here without her loving care. Let us know how it goes and as always let us know if we can help.

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DID YOU KNOW? The following information was discovered by Lauren Owen. We feel it can be of help to families in business. Not often you can get money 100% backed by the SBA!

Existing Loan Payment Relief

This loan program, called the America’s Recovery Capital (ARC) will soon offer deferred-payment loans of up to \$35,000 backed 100 percent by SBA to viable small businesses that need help making payments on an existing, qualifying loan for up to six months. (Note: the existing loan does not have to be a SBA loan to qualify.) Repayment does not begin until 12 months after the loan is fully disbursed and will be for the principal amount only. (ARC loans cannot be made to cover payments on an existing loan that was guaranteed by SBA before February 17, 2009, the day the bill was signed into law.) As of this writing, the final details on the ARC were still being worked out and the loans were not yet available. Check with your local bank or SBA Website to find out when these loans will be available.

NOW AVAILABLE - Jim's BOOK: "Roadmap to Success"
Jim is co-author with Stephen Covey and Ken Blanchard.
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