

# C.H.A.L.L.E.N.G.E.S.<sup>®</sup>

Working with Families in Business

[www.challengesinc.com](http://www.challengesinc.com) [info@challengesinc.com](mailto:info@challengesinc.com)

1888-273-8307



## NEWSLETTER

*“It is a wise child that knows his father, and an unusual one that unreservedly approves of him.” - Mark Twain*

### Question from a reader:

“Last month you offered very meaningful advice about dealing with conflict and stress between an adult child and their mother and the love we should have for her. Can you offer any advice concerning conflict with dad?”

From time to time, relationships between parents and children, in any family, can be difficult. In a family business those relationships can become more strained as the children become adults and the parents have a difficult time communicating with their now adult children. Many times the conflict is between the children and the mother, as you mentioned, but most often, especially in family businesses, that conflict lands squarely on the shoulders of the father.

As a father and having been privileged to work with many hundreds of fathers in family businesses, I can honestly say that most fathers I have spoken to, and I concur, have difficulty understanding how conflict with any of their children began. Recently, a father was discussing how his son was avoiding him and how their relationship had become very strained. The last incident occurred when the son informed his dad he was in the process of buying a car. Dad immediately began telling his son some of the “experiences” he had in buying cars over the years. The discussion ended when the son stated, “You are always telling me what to do. It never stops. You never listen.” Dad was mortified. It was not his intention to tell his son what to do. He only wanted to help his son avoid some of the “traps” he had experienced when he bought his first car. How did the conversation become so confrontational?

When a man becomes a father he begins to take on a role that it is impossible to train for, yet he is faced with one of the most daunting roles he will ever have, how to be a good father. As fathers, we enter into the role with all our human frailties that include our values as well as our vices. Yet, most of us try to become a source of stability and peace in our families. We often end up with just the opposite.

How do many of us need to change and how can our children help us? It begins with information. My wife, Ann Marie, has always said, “to better understand your children (or your parents), when a conversation begins the listener must ask the following question, “Do you want me to offer advice, answer/or ask questions, or just listen to what you are saying without comment?” If the person who begins the conversation started with, “I would like your advice on what I am about to say” or “I would like you to answer my questions after I have stated my entire issue,” or “I just need to vent, so please allow me to do so without comment” just think of the conflicts that would never take place. This is especially true with fathers (*works for moms too*) who are trying hard to protect their children from any type of harm, especially in those areas the father has already experienced. It is hard for fathers not to “butt in” and when we do the words we use just don’t seem to come out the way we wanted them to.

Influences in our lives help make us what and who we are. We are all different. There is no “one way” to be a father or a son or daughter. Our emotions are so different that what may work for one family will not for another. We have found Ann Marie’s advice to be a great exception. For all members of the family in business just knowing how to listen with love, and not always with our advice, uttered like proclamations, is the best communication tool to reduce interpersonal conflict.

Sure, give this article to your dad but also make the commitment that you are going to do a better job of communicating the way you want dad to listen. Your relationship will change and it will be for the better.

As father’s day approaches it is important for us all to remember that even our fathers are imperfect beings and not the perfect super heroes we always thought they were. As children we don’t realize this imperfectness until we get older. For many of us when we realize it, the shock is very hard to understand. The realization alone appears to create interpersonal conflict with between many fathers and children. As adult children we have to realize that our dads are fallible human beings who love us and want the best for us. We need to love them for it!

Most fathers are always there when you need them. Most fathers will gladly die to allow their children (even adult children) to have lives without the hardships and stress they have experienced. Love your dad. Take the responsibility to communicate more effectively with him and he will with you. Realize he is human and will make mistakes but he always has your best interest in his heart. This father’s day, tell him you love him. He will like to hear it. Enjoy your time with him as it ends too soon.

As this father’s day approaches I will also continue to thank God that I realized the humanness of my dad instead of trying to hold him to the status of the super hero he was to me when I was young. This understanding of humanness allowed me to love him, and he me, with all

our values and vices and not falter in that love. Dad and I got to the point of actually telling each other that we love one another, every time we talked. It changed our relationship from stress to one of closeness and outward love. Love your dad. Fix a strained relationship because time goes by too fast and when he is gone, you will miss him as much as I miss my dad. I love you dad. Happy Father's Day.

**C.H.A.L.L.E.N.G.E.S.®** Jim & Ann Marie Kwaiser 1888-273-8307  
[ann@challengesinc.com](mailto:ann@challengesinc.com) or [jim@challengesinc.com](mailto:jim@challengesinc.com)  
Or Smitty Boros [sboros@zoominternet.net](mailto:sboros@zoominternet.net) Pittsburgh, PA  
Or Lauren Owen [laurenOwen427@gmail.com](mailto:laurenOwen427@gmail.com) Seattle, Washington

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