

Family Goals: The Beginning and the End

If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there. In business it is perfectly clear success ultimately depends on the ability to establish challenging but appropriate goals and to achieve them. And while financial goals may offer architecture, the actual engineering and construction is accomplished through the hard and human work of management and marketing.

But what about the family? We have often maintained in these pages that in family business systems which enjoy long-term success, the family recognizes that the business ultimately serves the family's goals. We also know that family businesses can be strengthened by infusion of the owning family's goals, values and discipline which, in turn, potentially offers a sense of belonging and meaning that can strengthen motivation and commitment by all who belong to the system. So the business serves the family's goals and can be strengthened and sustained by service to those goals, but that all works only when the family develops and subscribes to shared and articulated goals.

Entrepreneurs are often so busy and pressured, that their goals and strategies remain unarticulated, much less any sense of larger motivations. When survival is the name of the game, one spends little emotional or intellectual energy on self-actualization. But what is natural, common sense, and just plain habitual to the founding generation, is rarely so self-evident to the successor generation. They typically have another question "Why?" And if that question has no better answer than to make a buck or to honor your parents or to not rock the boat, the motivation to sustain the family business is usually lacking.

Unaware of the importance of articulated family goals or unable to identify them, many business-owning families lack clear direction. We just want everyone to get along, many say. We want

everyone to be happy. Hoping for good relations and individual happiness in a family is similar to hoping for strong capitalization and profitability in a business. While challenges in these domains are not uncommon, relationships in the family like finance in the business, provide basic architecture. It makes the effort required to move forward together both possible and desirable, but it doesn't hint at where to go or how to get there.

In an era when many people's child-rearing philosophies center on maintaining their offsprings' happiness, perhaps it is not surprising that too few can readily state their family's goals. And at a time when flexibility and tolerance are so widely hailed as key values, the probability of true commitment to any given principle or goal is significantly reduced. Finally, given the difficulty of a family's sitting down and achieving meaningful consensus on a set of family goals, those who even make the effort deserve admiration. A family's goals grow out of its traditions and values. Articulating goals is achieved through family meetings and an effort to incorporate the feelings of all family members into one statement. Here's one example:

We seek to achieve growth and prosperity, extending beyond the present generation, through our business ... We are committed to providing opportunities for descendants of Richard C. and Iris Carlson...and their families to (1) obtain a firsthand understanding of the risks and rewards of American business ownership, (2) gain insight into the value of Christian principles in business, (3) experience the sacrifices and rewards of family members closely working together toward common objectives, and (4) maximize the quality of life for their families and future generations.

To encourage all descendants of the founders and their family members to develop and apply their specialized talents to the business and to compensate them according to their contribution. To provide an ownership opportunity to all direct descendants of the founders while they are full-time participants in the business. To foster a spirit of belonging as "extended family" to nonfamily employees as well, by sharing appreciation, rewards, and benefits

that will maximize a mutually prosperous and enriching long-term relationship. Nietzsche said: "One who has a "Why" to live, can deal with almost any "How." ∞ Harvard psychologist Barrie GRIEFF amends that by saying, "One who has a "why" and a "how" to live and passes them on can live forever."

In family businesses, the family can provide the "why" ∞ and the business can provide the "how," and if those are passed on, a kind of immortality is achievable.

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