

Overcoming Stressors within the Family Business

A long-established family business is a classic showcase for Managing Stress and Organisational Change

Carole Spiers



'You can leave a company but you can't leave a family' is the truism applicable to a family member, of whatever gender, age or status, who may feel discontented with their position within a family business.

Those who work in a family business know it generates its own particular set of pressures and challenges. The obvious benefits of loyalty, security and continuity can be nullified by personal conflicts and issues of control and seniority that can cause resentment. Working with your family all day and living with them in the community can create a claustrophobic environment which, without professional help, can lead to frustration, poor health and performance. As an experienced stress consultant, I view a family business as an environment where most of the usual workplace stress-factors can be observed to be of a greater intensity than in a non-family concerns.

Expectations of the young

The effective management of change plays an essential part in re-motivating those individuals who may be feeling demoralised by the prospects of organisational change that they (incorrectly) may perceive as adversely impacting their career prospects. In a family business, this naturally can become a major frustration. Consider the position of the bright youngster who is given a glowing picture of his future as a potential partner or MD. With this prospect in mind and having been

reminded that he has a duty to serve the family business, he turns down other, often more attractive career-choices to remain within the family dynasty

So he opts to invests maybe 20 years, or so, in securing his position by steadily climbing the ladder, deferring to all family-members older than him, (anticipating the same deference to himself, in due course), and eventually, if he is lucky, he realises his ambition in being appointed a Director. However newly qualified graduates from western universities can be more assertive and questioning of long-held assumptions and business practices creating tensions in family businesses that are not easily resolved and often forcing well educated individuals to question more closely if the family business is indeed the right place or them to forge a career. Furthermore, the male expectation of automatic superior status within the family business has been affected by the emergence of newly enfranchised women. Products and markets have changed beyond recognition. The company itself might be engaged in a takeover or merger negotiations. All of which means that the expectations nurtured over the past 20 years might not be fulfilled, so that hopeful promise "One day, all this will be yours" rings more hollow than ever.

Blind loyalty won't help

Change is inevitable in any business - more so in a family business and such change is likely to impact on everyone in the organisation. It is therefore critical that the whole family feels involved in this change process, to ensure strength and unity. Change is unsettling and can be testing on different generations' ideas and values as they wrestle between the tried and tested and new innovations.

Take, for example, the point about sibling's duty to the family business. In a fast-changing world, a young person's first thought is to find a job that they feel able and are qualified to do which is likely to give them a steady career path and a degree of personal satisfaction. There is no absolute imperative that says they will find a niche within the family business and to cling to a sinking

vessel out of misguided loyalty will achieve no purpose. Ambitious young people may serve their families better by going in a different direction, and possibly reaching a position eventually where they may be able to help some of their relatives, either as employer, client or even supplier. The time has come for the traditional closed-shop nature of a family business to be adapted to the present era of diversity. Young people today are far more well travelled and technically astute than their elders, and may even have run a couple of online businesses before leaving college! To attract a well-travelled and experienced young, high achiever back into the family circle as a career-choice is a major challenge that needs handling with extreme sensitivity and tact. But it can pay handsome dividends, with the cross-pollination of the traditional with the new and untried.

Specialist guidance is available

Whenever different branches of a family are working under one roof, certain measures are needed to build a harmonious and effective team striving for the corporate good. Very often, specialist guidance on relationship-building within the family-business environment can be the subject of formal training and coaching.

Being a relative can sometimes lead to a clash of loyalties and confusion of identities, especially over promotions, retirement, succession planning, and the necessary adapting of patriarchal traditions. These tensions and potential conflicts can be avoided by ensuring clear roles and responsibilities by the utilisation of effective verbal and non-verbal communication at all levels.

Proprietorship is a more active and demanding role than it may look. It requires high credibility, to forge successful partnerships with other professionals, both within the family circle and beyond it. To measure up to it, candidates may need Personal Development Coaching, in order to master essential Management skills such as managing people, mediation, coaching and mentoring.

Bonding power

These are serious challenges for a family business to handle. But they can be overcome. They should not obscure the model that family businesses offer to the rest of the industry, by forming a solid, continuing unit increasingly lacking in today's work environment. For the hidden strength of the family business lies in its bonding power - the power to generate an ethos of ownership among the whole team, and encourage a stakeholder attitude among all, from the highest to the humblest.

World-class corporate giants, often soulless and dissatisfied at rock bottom, have plenty to learn from the community mind, spirit and heart of the well-run family business.

Some familiar challenges

- **Patriarchal style**
Over-preserving the methods and routines of the founder
- **Age, rank & status**
Confusion between executive rank and family seniority
- **Clarifying of terms**
Dangers of informal directives and statements of intent
- **Consensus over big decisions**
Consulting all employees over major issues of policy
- **Succession planning**
Averting rivalry by documenting plans for ownership transfer

Role of the Family Relationship Coach

- **Stimulating self-development**
Empower employees to take responsibility for themselves

- **Generating effective dialogue**
Coaching in key communication skills for high performance
- **Family-related stress issues**
Defusing potential conflicts between family members
- **Policies & procedures**
Formalising of cautions, rules and complaints processes
- **Next phase of the business**
Stimulating open discussion of business aims and targets

Carole Spiers MIHPE, MISMA is the immediate Past President of the Professional Speakers Association and a VP of the International Stress Management Association. Carole is a sought-after keynote speaker working with equal success in the contrasting cultures of the UK and UAE, with blue-chip clients from IBM to Dubai Cables.

Her credibility is rooted in twenty years' success as CEO of a leading UK Stress Management Consultancy. As a leading Authority on Corporate Stress, BBC guest-broadcaster and author, Carole's mission is to empower organisations to achieve sustainable success through a healthy workplace culture where her stress management expertise is in demand around the world.

Contact Carole Spiers Group for proven stress management solutions:
www.carolespiersgroup.com

Follow Carole on Twitter: @thestressguru

CONFERENCE EXTRA!!

A limited number of hardcopies of the conference delegate packs are available for purchase:

Hardcopy: £10.00 inc P&P - or you can purchase an **Electronic copy** at £7.50.

Payment via ISMA's website & PayPal.

Contact Chris Clarke for further details:

stress@isma.org.uk or T: 01179 697284