

The Family That Works Together

What if you also want to enjoy Thanksgiving dinner together?

Working with family can be both a blessing and a curse. There is nothing more rewarding than coming to work every day and spending time with those that you love. However, working with family also comes with challenges. If certain things are not done correctly, your business could prevent you from sitting down and enjoying Thanksgiving dinner together.

Many children actually grow up in the business and are capable, contributing employees. Unfortunately, sometimes a child may feel that they are actually entitled to more because they share your family name. Children who work in a family business cannot expect a red carpet laid out for them when they come to work. They need to be prepared to come in earlier, stay later, and even work harder than non-family members. Family members must remember that their name comes with a reputation in the business that must be used wisely. Always treat the business as nothing more than what it is, a business. Your most important assets are the families that you go home to every night.

We always suggest that before entering the family business, a child of a business owner should work somewhere else first. This helps the adult child learning how to separate family interests from business interests. As a family, give back to the community and your industry. Take outside business and management classes that allow you to bring added value to the business, not just your last name. You and your family should avoid displays of wealth at work. Leave the expensive car at home. All visible wealth accomplishes is to stir up envy and resentment with non-family employees.

What are some of the best ways to assure family harmony?

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- Parents need to develop their children’s values and capabilities.
- Have a family mission statement.
- Build a family team of owners.
- Have a written participation policy which outlines what is involved if a family member wants to come to work in the business.
- Retain non-family members.
- Compensate equitably based on the basis of what the job is worth.
- Instill both a competitive and service ethic for the business.

The founder of the business needs to impart the culture of the business to other family members. Family members must strive to improve the business and be continually innovative. They must never forget that their most important assets are their employees. Family members must always treat each other with fairness and dignity. You must have written rules for resolving conflict. Family members must understand the principle of stewardship. Put simply . . . when it comes to family . . . treat each fairly, but not always equally.

What could prevent a harmonious Thanksgiving dinner? The normal human relationship problems between family members, role ambiguity in the business, family politics, power struggles, conflicts of interests, and sibling rivalry. One final word of caution: keep family squabbles out of the office. Everybody is watching.

Your business is not worth the loss of family harmony or a joyful Thanksgiving Dinner.

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