

Enterprising Rural Families™



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Communication Breakdown: How to get unstuck

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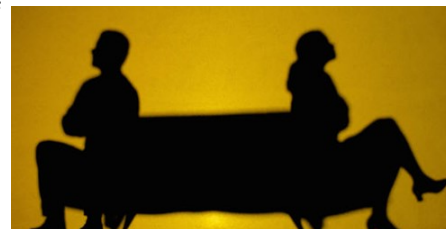
Being in business is tough. Being in business with family members is even tougher. Family and business roles sometimes get confused. Words can be misinterpreted. Tempers can flare. Farm families sometimes find themselves embroiled in bitter disputes -- or harboring deep unspoken resentments.

The causes can vary. One person may continually leave the barn door open or the tractor grimy and out of gas. One brother may be paid more or put in more hours than the other. Mom and Dad may do the books and refuse to let their son see them. A budget may have been agreed on and two weeks later Dad shows up with a new pick-up he got "great deal" on. Two brothers may be discussing buying a new tractor and one may go out and buy the one he wants.

Regardless of the cause, resolving disagreements is essential to the well-being of the business and family relations. Suppose you've tried everything you can think of and are still deadlocked. What should you do? Stop. Stand to the side, and analyze what's going on. Make sure you're not engaged in a power struggle or struggling with the past.

Farm families often get mired in old issues. Disagreements often have more to do with past events, resentment, one-upmanship, guilt, control, jealousy, insecurity, disappointment, and unmet needs than the current issue.

This newsletter is an instrument of the Enterprising Rural Families: Making It Work program of University of Wyoming Extension. For further information concerning the Enterprising Rural Families program or on-line course contact information@eRuralFamilies.org or go to <http://eRuralFamilies.org/>.



Tip of the Month



Summer Tips to Grow your Business

Adapted from the U.S. Small Business Administration (www.sba.gov)

Looking for ideas to incorporate the summer season into your marketing plans this year? Whether it's a busy or quiet time for your business, here are some things you can do to take advantage of the summer months to grow your business!

Take Your Business into the Fresh Air

Don't wait for your customers to come to you; look for ways to get in front of them. Whether you run a retail store, restaurant or provide a service to customers, consider the following:

- **Host a Cookout** – Invite your customers (past and present) to join your business for a celebration of

summer. Use your parking lot or a local public park and plan on catering yourself (a grill, hot dogs, hamburgers, salad, and cold drinks are fine).

- **Take Part in Local Markets, Events and Fairs** – What better way to win new business? Go to the places where people gather in the summer, set up a booth to share your business' information along with a free sample or coupon of your product or service.

Spoil Your Customers

I mentioned hosting a cookout above, but what about treating a select group of loyal customers to an appreciation event like an afternoon at a winery, a round of golf, or an afternoon of fishing?

Give Back to the Community

Community projects are a great way to build your brand and give back to the

community. Why not organize or sponsor a community service day or charitable event? Pick a cause that's a good fit for your business and reach out to the media, in addition to doing your own marketing, to publicize it. Helping with a park or road-side trash pick-up or a house-building project for charity are two summertime ideas to consider. You can also deduct certain expenses related to any volunteer work or charitable giving.

Summer-ize Marketing Activities

From your website to your email newsletter, look for ways to incorporate summer themes and information that are relevant to your customers. Showcase any summer specials and share summer-specific information or tips with your customers. Pre-order low-cost summer promotional items. Branded goods such as Frisbees, beach balls and drink coolers will ensure your logo is in front of customers all summer long.



“If it appears that “old garbage” or “emotional baggage” is preventing you from moving ahead, you may want to do some baggage sorting exercises...”

For example, a sibling might be resentful because his brother got a costlier pony than he did when they were children. Sometimes the stated issue is a facade for some other frustration. A wife may complain that her husband is always late for meals; he may counter that she's haranguing him. In reality, she may simply want him to say he notices and appreciates her efforts -- and vice versa.

There are four primary causes of conflict in a family business:

1. People feel unappreciated or misunderstood,
2. They feel something is unfair,
3. They feel powerless, or
4. Family and business roles have gotten mixed up.

If it appears that "old garbage" or "emotional baggage" is preventing you from moving ahead, you may want to do some baggage sorting exercises. Find out how people feel. Find out what's really bugging them or why they feel hurt. Find out what they're afraid of or worried about.

Look at family roles and expectations. Family members often get locked into roles. They may feel they must be "the strong, silent Dad," "the sounding board Mom," or "the rebellious child." They're immobilized by family values and expectations.

Defining family values and expectations is an exercise that may yield some surprising insights. Get each family member to write answers to the following questions on a piece of paper: What is the purpose of the family business? What does the family stand for? What do you expect the farm to give you? What does the family expect of you? How are we supposed to treat each other? Then discuss the answers.

Having each family member list their goals and priorities can prove equally revealing. When other family members explain their feelings, don't judge them or defend yourself. Just listen. Often, all they need is to unload. In any discussions, it's vital that people truly listen to each other. Intimates often believe they "know" each other's thoughts. Not so -- when evidenced by the resulting disagreements.

One way of ensuring that all parties are understood and understood each other is to play parrot. Just sum up what the other person has said. Doing this validates their feelings and assures them that they have been heard and understood.

Try to turn negative complaints into positive requests. For example, if Mom is going on with Dad about spending money without telling her, he could sum up by saying 'You need me to tell you what checks I've written so you can balance the book at the end of the month.' Frequent parrot practice is advised. Active, empathic listening shortens and prevents arguments.

Make sure everybody gets equal air time when discussing business and family issues. If one person dominates the conversation or keeps interrupting others, try the ten button technique. Give everybody ten buttons. When a person speaks he must put down a button. When he has used all his buttons, he must button up.

Once you've addressed the past and people's feelings, address the problem. While it's important to talk about the past and process feelings, it's equally important to get beyond the past. Once people have vented their frustrations, move on. Focus on the present and future and solving the problem. But be sure to separate the people



from the problem. If you see the other party as the problem, chances are you'll spend all your time and energy attacking them and never get around to attacking the problem.

Define the problem. Be precise. To get specific results, you must file specific grievances. Vague or unclear statements like, "You're not pulling your weight around here" or "You don't spend enough time with me and the kids" will not work to get the message across. Instead, explain exactly what you want in the future. "I want you to enter all our receipts into the computer by the end of each month" or "I want you to finish chores early on Sunday so we can all go cross-country skiing together" give your spouse or child a concrete request they can address.



Next, negotiate. Don't do what most people do -- take a position and put all their energy into advancing or defending it. Positional arguing is inefficient. At best, it might produce a compromise. Rarely, however, will it yield the wisest or best possible solution. Don't make the mistake of marrying a position. Be willing to let go.

When you're negotiating, be open to suggestions. Don't limit yourselves to meet-you-in-the-middle compromises. Instead of dickering over how to split the pie, try to find ways to enlarge the pie or bake a whole new one.

Negotiating works best if divided into four distinct phases. First, articulate. Tell each other what you want and why. Focus on goals and wishes, not positions. Chances are you'll discover you have more in common than in conflict. When stating your wishes, be blunt but thorough. Miscommunication, which often leads to conflict, also produces less-than-best compromises. Directness and detail are vital. Otherwise you'll end up like the two chefs who each got half an orange when one wanted the juice and the other wanted the rind, he says.

Second, brainstorm together. Dream up all the possible solutions you can think of. Be creative. The sky's the limit. When brainstorming, suspend judgment. Don't debate an idea's feasibility. Entertain all suggestions, no matter how crazy they seem at first. Next, discuss the most promising ideas you and your brainstorming partner(s) came up with. Look for areas of mutual interest and gain. Try to devise win-win solutions.

Third, if no immediate resolution is reached, decide what criteria you're going to use to resolve your dispute. Use objective criteria. Criteria you might consider include: precedents, experts' opinions, industry standards or practices, scientific studies, the going price, the best price, what's most efficient, what's equitable, what is fair treatment, tradition, or community mores. Relying on a third-party yardstick, benchmark or authority prevents you from getting entangled in a no-win battle of wills. It also defuses tensions and prevents hard feelings.

Fourth, make a deal and put the disagreement behind you. Have each person summarize his understanding of the agreement just struck and who is responsible for what. This will mitigate the risk of any further dissension. Remember, with all disagreements, your goal should be to resolve the matter wisely, efficiently, and amicably.

Keep in mind that in a family business your relationship with the person you are in a communication breakdown with is usually far more important than whatever you are disagreeing about or the outcome of your negotiation.

(Communication techniques and problem solving in family businesses are covered in greater detail in the *Enterprising Rural Families: Making It Work*™ on-line course.)

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