



Building Relationships - Coaching Solutions for Family Business

by Jennifer East

Family business provides a complex and often challenging environment in which to grow up, work and build strong relationships. Predictably, the success or failure of relationships - with ourselves and other family members - often determines the sustainability of the family enterprise.

Coaching sometimes referred to as executive or life coaching provides a powerful tool to help families build lasting relationships. Coaching begins with the recognition that our success as individuals, and as families in business together, begins with the human dynamic that is, what's going on inside of us and between us. Everyone must understand what's working - and what's not - and what we can do (individually and together) to effect change.

Families working with a coach learn to recognize that the answer to business challenges lies within themselves. Only by exploring individual strengths and objectives, and by clarifying the vision of the family as a whole, can a sustainable strategy be developed for the future of the business.

What prevents families from discovering these answers on their own? Three factors, unique to family business, that often disrupt even the closest family units:

Sense of self

Many circumstances can prevent individual members of a family business from developing an awareness of their own strengths, and a clear vision for the future: living under the shadow of successful entrepreneurs, insulation from the world by the comforts of family wealth, pressure to continue the family firm, being defined by the family name and intensive interaction with other family members involved in the business.

Communication

Interpersonal dynamics interfere with open communication in many families, not just those in business together. The complexity of running a successful business, raising a family, dealing with succession and inheritance issues and integrating new family members into the business can strain relationships and prevent people from talking openly.

Personal Responsibility

As communication breaks down, everyone makes assumptions, and finds others at fault when things go wrong. In some cases, parents watch children make bad business decisions, unsure of how to take tough action without damaging the family relationship. Children of privilege may feel entitled, and so blame others for their own lack of initiative. Or worse, children may have no clear sense of their own skills or contribution, and feel powerless.

Coaching Solutions

Coaching tackles these issues head-on. Coach and client develop a confidential and powerful relationship based on trust and mutual respect. Family members working with a coach one-on-one meet in person or speak by phone on a regular basis. Through the coaching process, clients explore their hopes and dreams, learn about their strengths and areas for improvement and implement strategies to achieve their goals, all with the support of their coach.

Through enhanced self-awareness and the development of clear, measurable goals and objectives, clients become more confident and willing to address the most challenging issues they face.

Coaching the family as a whole builds similar strengths. Through regular family meetings, the coach encourages discussions about difficult topics. As each individual shares opinions openly and listens to others, the family grows together. Coach and clients collaborate to develop a safe and structured process to deal with today's challenging issues, one that can also be used for future disagreements.

Coaching is about change, about understanding ourselves and learning more about the people we live and work with. The coaching process enables families to address the human issues inherent to family business, so that relationships are strengthened, and solid business decisions can be made. Only by acknowledging that families in business together are people first, with especially complex relationships, can a family build a sustainable future together.

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is the Founder of ONIDA Coaching + Consulting Inc., a Canadian coaching firm. She is an internationally trained family business coach and facilitator, and has spent 20 years in her own family's business. Jennifer helps family members find ways to talk about what's most difficult, create a strategic or succession plan, grow into a leadership role, instill philanthropic values, or leave a lasting legacy. For more information, visit www.onida.ca, or contact Jennifer at (001) 416 922 8973 or jennifer@onida.ca.