

Ties that Bind

Family Business Leadership

MINNESOTA BUSINESS
LEADERSHIP • OPPORTUNITY • GROWTH

Part two in a three-part series on navigating the myths and “high C’s” of leadership.

BY Tom Hubler

Leaders are born, not made. Right? In my experience, this is a myth surrounding entrepreneurship and family businesses. Leadership is a learned activity that connects intellectual theories with life experiences held in our bodies. In other words, leadership is hard-wired through awareness. Leaders learn how to inspire others so that they in turn release their own gifts and skills to support the common vision. Leaders succeed by operating out of their center, using their personal essence authentically and automatically.

In a similar way, a batter “digs in” at the plate to prepare for the first pitch. This centers the batter, allowing them to focus on learned skills. A piano soloist runs through a series of practices to become similarly centered before a recital performance.

When it comes to leadership in business families, the younger generation of adult children must learn to acquire their center to become effective leaders. This allows them to respond automatically and naturally, without consciously applying reason or cognitive ability. They adapt practices that take them beyond their body armor—a concept developed by Wilhelm Reich, a contemporary of Freud. Body armor is the body’s adjustments to past life experiences, including experiences within the business and the family.

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naturally telegraph an authentic and genuine leadership presence that inspires the best in others. This is an essential aspect of character.

Of the three C’s of leadership (competency, commitment and character, discussed in my previous article), let’s further explore how character applies to our bodies. Reich states that the body accommodates and stores within its musculature all the positive and negative experiences that occur in our life. Those life experiences can disconnect our bodies from our heads. Historical experiences stored in our bodies strongly influence how we interact with the world. The separation of our body from our intellect can make people in leadership positions ineffective at influencing the outcome and direction of a company.

In my practice I have many examples where younger adult children in a business family learned to lead from their center or core and become more effective. One example is a third-generation son who was put in charge of organizing the warehouse of the family business. He was blunt and critical of many of the employees. In the process of accomplishing the work, he alienated the team. The ware-

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house was well organized, but the end result was negative.

He recently participated in the Leadership in Action program at the Strozzi Institute. The Strozzi Institute is a training center for Embodied Leadership, offering public and private programs for corporations, small businesses and individuals interested in developing their leadership presence and effectiveness. There this young man learned to integrate his cognitive self with his body’s responses. In the process of understanding his history, he devised a statement or declaration about his leadership that transformed his



THE CONTRIBUTOR

Tom Hubler (tomh@thehublergroup.com) is president of Hubler Family Business Consultants (www.hublerfamilybusiness.com) and an adjunct professor at the University of St. Thomas.

presence and effectiveness. His declaration was, "I am committed to being a good husband, and I know if I can be a good husband, I will be a good leader." He was engaged to be married at the time. He realized that the emotional skills of a good husband and father were essentially the same skills required of a good leader in the company. Upon his return to the company, his success has continued, and he now leads the company's strategic planning effort and oversees its branch offices.

Another telling example of the integration of mind and body is a young heir-apparent in a business family where we collaborated with the Strozzi Institute in helping the son take what he learned at the Leadership in Action program back

to the company. Previously, the father and son were frequently engaged in conflicts that escalated into shouting matches. This harmed both their personal and their business relationships. When the son returned from the leadership program he shared his declaration with everyone, saying "I am committed to living a life of dignity. I realize that when I fight with my father I lose my dignity and take away his, too." The son also stated that as a result of the realizations he discovered at the program, he was going to "beg" his own son for forgiveness for how he had treated him at his youth ball games. The son realized that he was placing unrealistic expectations on his own son. As a result of the son's insight and leadership training, not only was his relationship with his

father strengthened, he also strengthened his relationship with his own son.

Leaders in family businesses who strengthen their effectiveness with the integration of their mind and body through the development of practices that help them embody leadership skills and move towards their center can have a significant impact on others. As leaders, they can learn to be less reactive and become more effective in carrying forward the vision and mission of their company. As you pursue your own leadership development plan, we encourage you to develop practices that will increase your effectiveness by reading books or attending workshops that focus on leadership and the integration of mind and body. **MB**