

The Price of Peacekeeping

Small problems ignored become very large problems

One of the driving forces for entrepreneurs and their families is family unity. No entrepreneur and their spouse want to be in their 60s, 70s—or even their 80s—and have business and financial differences tearing the family apart. Unfortunately, family unity can be an elusive goal for many family businesses.

BY TOM HUBLER

will upset everything." Nothing is said and time passes; it's Labor Day, then it's Thanksgiving and finally, it's Christmas. Every time the family gets together, the small problems are ignored and instead of going away, they fester, eventually growing into larger problems.

Even with the good intention of maintaining family harmony, family members inadvertently create the very problem

common good of the family, even if it means they won't get exactly what they want. But they can feel good about the contribution, because it advances the common good of the family—and the business.

One of my clients, who I will call the Sweeney Family, is a good example. The family owns a large business where the father and his eldest son work in the business; the mother and three other children are inactive.

Good Intentions

In my 25 years of experience with family business, the challenge of maintaining family unity can be explained by "Hubler's Speck of Dust Theory," which is taught in all the major universities in the country. [The truth is, no one has ever heard of the theory, but its implications are seen in most family-owned businesses.]

My theory states that when families gather and there are minor business or financial differences, family members often think: "We're all going to the lake for the Fourth of July, and I don't want to create a family problem by bringing up our differences—it

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they're trying to avoid by not discussing business and financial differences. To avoid conflict, most families try to compromise or give things up they care about to keep the peace. I understand how this can happen; as a young boy, I was taught to do both. But experience has taught me that compromising and giving things up doesn't really work.

To unify their family, they worked together to create a common vision based on their family values to prevent business and financial differences from eroding family relationships.

To create their vision, the Sweeney family held a family meeting where they shared their values, and used them to create a common family vision:

"Our family circle is an unbreakable bond of support, belief in each other and unconditional love. It inspires us to live our lives with humility, integrity and philanthropy. We manifest this through our families, our foundation and our businesses."

At a future family meeting, I challenge you to be like the Sweeney family and answer the question: What are the family values you want to see perpetuated in your company and used to unite your family? Your answer will help strengthen both your family and your business. ☪

Good Deeds

The key to enhancing family unity is to work together to create a common family vision based on shared values. When families share a vision, it leads to greater understanding and communication.

When we give to the collection at church or to our favorite charity, we feel good because we know that we are furthering the common good. The same is true in family businesses. Family members also may be called upon to make a contribution to the

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