

The Dispatch

The December 2021: Hunger for...

Though most people would be reluctant to admit it, important Holidays in America are increasingly about food. In fact, the mere mention of the word “Thanksgiving” in a gathering often makes mouths salivate and stomachs rumble. While recognizing the important (and joyful) role that food plays in our Holidays, we would also like to redirect that concept so that it focuses on a generic human desire, rather than the specific desire for food. In this issue we discuss three types of hunger—for certainty, peace, and simplicity. Lance first explores how we can move towards some certainty in our family businesses, despite being in a profession where certainty is hard to come by. Davon emphasizes a hunger for peace, primarily in the context of family relations. And Bill picks up on the importance of simplicity where we often hear a bewildering variety of conflicting information. We hope you have a Merry Christmas, and that your hunger will be sated not only by food, but by deeper relationships, some certainty and peace.

Hunger for...Certainty

[Lance Woodbury](#)

Family businesses, especially in agriculture, experience plenty of challenges outside of their control. From input prices to demand for protein, from weather patterns to consumer preferences, agriculture is one of the few industries that hold little sway over their many markets. As John F. Kennedy famously said, “The farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways.”

It’s no wonder, then, that family farm and ranch owners hunger for certainty. They hedge volatile grain prices, lock-in production costs when they sense the appropriate low, use crop insurance to protect income, plan early to manage income tax, and even attempt to lower the tax-related value of their businesses well before their death, in order to control the impact of the estate tax.

Despite having so little control over so many factors affecting the business, one of the areas we *do* have control over is the communication we have as family members and business partners. Yet I often find that uncertainty about future transitions, that is, who gets the ownership and control of the business when the senior generation retires or passes away, is one of the most difficult areas to discuss. Even as families plan to avoid the estate tax, they struggle to talk about how the next generation will share ownership and make decisions together. Those are topics well within the control of the family, but conversations often don’t happen, and the result can be unrealized expectations, disappointment, and anger.

As you enjoy an abundance of food at the holiday table, consider the unanswered questions – the hunger for certainty – you have about the future of your family business, and schedule some time to dig in to the questions only your family can answer.

Hunger for...Peace

[Davon Cook](#)

I think many of us are hungry for *peace* this holiday season, but peace can take many forms. We almost immediately think of international issues, as well as healing some rifts that are present domestically. While those are valuable topics to focus on, and indeed, draw my interest, I have been musing on a much more local desire for peace.

I see family members hoping for peace in the sense of a *meaningful connection* with each other. It can be possible in most situations—if you're aiming for a level that is reasonable for the situation. Families are complicated and sometimes a business makes them more so. Not everyone will have the Cleaver version of Christmas, and that's ok. Define what an attainable, meaningful connection looks like for you.

Maybe it's a private walk away from the hubbub with a family member who understands you. Or *truly* putting aside your differences for a meal with mom to share appreciation for your common heritage—even if you don't choose to be business partners today. Perhaps a new format or location of gathering sets a different tone, helping you move beyond difficult memories from the past. Consider establishing a new tradition to help the next generation of far-flung cousins bond since they'll be sharing ownership in land someday—or make time for an old tradition to do the same. Those moments of connection and peace may be brief but contribute to long term relationships.

May you find your attainable version of peace this holiday season.

Hunger for...Simplicity

[Bill Long](#)

According to the (big) dictionary, "simplicity" means something "easy" or "uncomplicated" to perform. But it has a secondary meaning: "a basic or fundamental task." For example, we can say, "We performed the simplicities needed to prepare the car for the trip." It is this meaning of simplicity which interests me here. My point is that often, in dealing with pressures of life, pressures that have intensified in the days since March 2020, I and people I know tend to lose sight of the simplicities.

Here is an example. Not far from my home is a coffee shop that hosts all kinds of meetings. Every Tuesday morning the "retired guys," many of whom were lawyers or real estate professionals, get together to do what I jokingly refer to as create more problems than they solve. I enjoy the fellowship of the group, but the thing that begins to wear on me is the fact that the more people talk, the more the problems seem to escalate or be insoluble. Headlines read a week ago become front and center discussion pieces only to be forgotten when a new headline grabs someone else's attention. I have a feeling that many of us want to connect with one another but are unsure how to do that or what to do if that connection ever happens. We are making things harder, more complex, than they need to be.

My hope for 2022 is that in the midst of the diverse demands on you, you will be able to perceive your "simplicities," that is what is "basic or fundamental." What is fundamental in your most intimate relationships? What in your business? What in your spiritual life? What in your travel or pleasure life? I have the sense that if you have successfully identified your "basics" or "fundamentals," other things will fall into place. The familiar old Shaker folk tune, "Tis a Gift to be Simple" might just be my hymn for 2022.