

# The Dispatch

## The March 2021: Conversations that Move Us Forward

In this issue of the *Dispatch* we deal with the difficult issue of moving past conflict. Davon begins by speaking of the ways we “imagine” what others might be thinking of us, rather than what actually is going on. Lance explores what we need in any particular situation to move the relationship forward. Finally, Bill looks at the Biblical story of the reconciliation conversation between Joseph and his brothers to try to determine what broke the years-long logjam of negativity in that family. As always, let us know if you have any reactions to our thoughts!

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### The Stories We Tell Ourselves

[Davon Cook](#)

One of the most useful concepts in the book [Crucial Conversations](#) (discussed more fully [here](#)) is the idea of “mastering my story.” Simplified, it is this: do not make assumptions about the motivations behind someone else’s behavior. We tend to tell ourselves a “story” of why they said this, or why they did that. If there is conflict in the situation, our story often assumes they intended to annoy us, cause hurt, or prove a point. That story then drives our own feelings, words, and reactions.

I think back to my time working with my father. In my first year at the cotton gin, one of my daily tasks was driving through the yards to plan the placement of incoming groups of cotton modules. It’s a daily jigsaw puzzle to maximize space as cotton arrives and leaves. After a while, I had the hang of it; but I noticed that even after a few months, my father was still driving off with the list every afternoon to check my work. I was annoyed, thinking he didn’t trust me and was a micromanager. I was new and still learning in most areas, so this was one thing I could call MY responsibility.

One day a long-time employee who knew him well, perhaps sensing my annoyance from my sighs and dagger looks, made an offhand comment: “He really needs to get out of the office, away from the phone and people, to have time to think.” Well, that hadn’t occurred to me. His behavior had more to do with his figuring out what worked best for him, and had little to do with me or my performance. What a novel concept!

What if we assumed the *best* as the starting place in assessing another’s behavior? What if we asked the other person clarifying questions and truly listened to the answer with an open mind? Unfortunately, sometimes the intention *is* bad and the harmful action, or inaction, *is* intentional. But by rethinking the story we are telling ourselves, we may come at a more accurate, and less confrontational, view of what others are doing.

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### The Central Question in Resolving and Preventing Conflict

[Lance Woodbury](#)

If you participate in a family business, the chance you will go through life without experiencing conflict with your family members or business partners is slim. Very slim. Like non-existent. To emphasize this point, I often say that a family business without conflict is dysfunctional!

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Conflict in the family business has varied sources. It can come from different expectations of what it means to be family members or business partners; misunderstanding or miscommunication about decisions, events, or behaviors; or interactions where one party was offended by the other.

Moving past conflict with a family member – and continuing the relationship – is no easy feat. It requires a willingness to listen and reflect on your own contribution to the issue. It also takes an ability to envision a future relationship. The central question in moving past conflict, whether it involves two people or a large family, is this:

**What do you need to see or hear from the other party in order to feel good about moving forward?**

“Seeing” something from the other party implies behavior, an act or action, demonstrating they have an interest in a relationship. It might be meeting more often, respecting personal boundaries, or confirming a decision instead of making an assumption. “Hearing” is about communication from the other person. It might be an apology, a thank you, an expression of love or forgiveness, or simply a commitment that they will try to do better in the future.

While it is important to acknowledge the past, you can’t change what happened. The central question works because it focuses on the future and creates a shared ownership of necessary changes. Those changes, in turn, help to prevent conflict in the future.

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**Faith & Family Business: Conversational Breakthrough**

[Bill Long](#)

*“I am Joseph Your Brother. Is My Father Still Alive?” (Genesis 45:3)*

One of the most moving passages of Scripture is the reconciliation scene in Genesis 45 where Joseph is reunited with his brothers and reveals his identity to them. You recall that a few chapters earlier the brothers, angered at Joseph’s arrogance and privileged position with their father Jacob, cast him into a desert pit and then sold him to passing traders, who eventually sold him into Egypt. The brothers thought they were through with their troublesome younger brother Joseph. In a word, he was dead to them.

But little did they know that God was orchestrating something behind the scenes that not only would save the life of the family during famine, but reunite the brothers who formerly were at odds. The brothers were forced to come down to Egypt, where Joseph was now a high official, to beg food from him. The dramatic action of Genesis 42-44 is the way that Joseph makes his brothers feel as vulnerable and exposed as he felt when they threw him into the pit.

Thus, when Genesis 45 opens, where Joseph can restrain himself no longer and bursts out in tears before revealing his identity, we have one of the keys for why this family conversation was able to get back “on track.” In short, in this case it is because Joseph and the brothers felt a like measure of vulnerability in each other’s presence. The thing that gives new life to the family are the two little pronouns in this verse: “your” and “my.” When Joseph can say that he both is THEIR brother and that he is longing for HIS father, he is saying that a new day can dawn in family relationships. In this instance it was equality of pain, rather than equality of strength, that enabled this First Family of Faith to reunite.