

The Dispatch

The June 2022: What's in a Name?

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold. (Proverbs 22:1)

Names are important. They recognize a person, a family, or a family business and their participation in the order of things. The occasional absence of a name might also be good, as the comedian George Burns said, "I get up every morning and read the obituary column. If my name's not there, I eat breakfast." In this issue of the Dispatch, our newest family business consultant, Ethan, suggests that our family names have aspirational value, communicating a particular standard or set of values. Davon offers helpful suggestions for how to use names in the family business. Finally, Bill reflects on how name choices have changed throughout the history of our country. As always, thanks for reading and simply reply to this message with any feedback. -- Lance

What's in the "Smith" Name?

[Ethan Smith](#)

Though I was briefly introduced in the May [Dispatch](#), I'd like to present myself to you in my own words. I'm Ethan Smith, and I have the pleasure of working with Davon and Lance on the Family Business Planning team at KCoe Isom.

I learned early in life that my surname is very common, and thus I had to focus on how to "differentiate" myself from other "Smiths." As you probably know, Smith is by far the most common surname in the US. According to the 2010 Census data, nearly 2.5 million people have that surname, more than 500,000 more than the next common surname. Easy to pronounce, but difficult to differentiate.

I learned early that the Smith name held high meaning to others in our family. It meant not just to be a farmer, cattleman, or community servant, but also to be diligent in work, help others in need and give leadership in our little town (Eustis, NE population 401). When I went off to school and then entered the working world, I made my own decisions on volunteering my time to help others, but I always did so conscious that I was a bearer of the Smith name. Now, in my 30s, I still feel that my biggest challenge is "living up to my name."

What does your family name mean to you? How are you continuing the legacy of your name? Someday I hope to learn the story *your name* carries, too.

How to Use a Name

[Davon Cook](#)

When, in conversation in the kitchen *with me*, my teenager refers to me as "Davon" instead of "Mom," it's usually with some smugness and intent to needle me. As in, "Now calm down, *Davon*. You're not being very professional." (This is after I pointed out she left dirty dishes in the sink for the umpteenth time). I don't endorse this use of my given name!

However, when working together with parents and children or other relatives, I do suggest using given names in the workplace. "Jim" instead of "Dad". "Lisa" instead of "Honey." It may feel awkward, but I recommend it for two reasons. First, it sends a message to others working around you. This is a professional workplace for everyone, including family. It sets a tone of respect for each other as coworkers that hopefully extends to all. It subconsciously diminishes perceptions that you're giving or receiving special treatment because of a familial relationship.

Second, it reminds you of the role you're in. Recall the three circles of family business: management, ownership, and family. At work, you are in the management and possibly ownership circles. It's a subtle reminder to keep

your mindset and communication style there – not in the emotions of the family. It reinforces a relationship as peers, not adult and child. In my own family business experience, interacting with and appreciating each other's professional abilities actually *deepened* the personal relationship and respect for my parents.

I'm not negating the fun and blessing of working with family. Celebrate that in the special moments. But in the day to day, consider how the names you're using may impact perceptions.

Names and American History

[Bill Long](#)

We just observed Memorial Day, dedicated to the memory of men and women who fought in our nation's wars, from Independence to today. While we celebrate part of our heritage, one thing we might not really understand is how our naming practices relate to that history.

Let me give you an example. The most famous jurist in American history was Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. He was born in 1841; his father, Oliver Sr, was born in 1809; and his father, Abiel, was born in 1763. Abiel? What's that? Well, it's an obscure biblical name, the name of King Saul's grandfather. Abiel Holmes was a Calvinist preacher in Boston. What is interesting in American history is how many people in Abiel's time had Old Testament names: Israel, Hezekiah, Boaz, Ebenezer, Eli. Girls also had their share, though they were named after virtues, too—Prudence, Charity, Patience.

But that all changed in the generation of Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr, around 1800. The big names in the 19th century for girls became Alice, Charlotte, Emily, and Julia, while for boys they were Charles, Henry, Samuel and William. Why the change? The American Revolution of 1776. In a word, we *lost* something and *gained* something in that Revolution. What we lost was a shared understanding of this land as the "New Israel" (hence the Old Testament names). What we gained was a sense of a "manifest destiny," reaching toward the future. That destiny wanted more "modern" names. And so we have them.

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