

June 2020 Dispatch

Letting Go in the Family Business

Vocation as Letting Go

Lance Woodbury

Your vocation is the work you do, where, as [Frederick Buechner](#) says, “your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Agriculture is full of people who love farming because they enjoy caring for the land and feeding others – as perfect a match to Buechner’s definition as may exist!

But within this perfect match, problems arise. Sometimes Mom and Dad find themselves unable to let go of daily farm or ranch operations. This inability to hand over the reins, to let the next generation be fully in-charge, can cause successors to become frustrated and possibly leave, or even break up the family business.

[Viktor Frankl](#), Holocaust survivor and author of the book [Man’s Search for Meaning](#), made it through the darkness and evil of a concentration camp by reframing the questions we usually ask in our jobs and careers. Instead of asking what we want from life, we should ask “[What does life expect of us?](#)”

In the context of family business succession, life expects the senior generation to let go, to move away from leadership, to let the next generation make decisions and deal with consequences. Parents, then, need to see their vocation – their calling – not as doing the physical work on the farm or ranch, but as ensuring the next generation has the resources and experience necessary to continue without the parents. Staying in the middle of daily operations and decisions tends to delay the transition.

A vocation of letting go may mean encouraging the next generation to explore options instead of giving them answers, intentionally being absent during a busy time, finding your [Second Mountain](#), moving to a true “[Chairman of the Board](#)” level, or supporting the next generation’s decisions and plans even if you don’t agree with all of them. A vocation of letting go shifts the focus from stewardship of land to stewardship of people; from feeding the world to forging the next generation. Is it time for you to find this *letting go* aspect of vocation?



Handing Off in Practice: Responsible to Informed

Davon Cook

While most recognize the need to let go or hand off as succession is taking place, how do you really hand off control and responsibility for a business that has been another of your babies for decades? Easier said than done. Oftentimes clients are stuck being too general. "I know I need to let go of some responsibility..." doesn't lead to concrete action of what responsibility, by when, to whom, and how the recipient is going to be prepared to succeed at it.

I like to use a practical list of Responsible/Consulted/Informed (which is a simplified version of a well-known model known as [RACI](#)). It's a matrix with tasks on the left and individuals across the top.

Task/Decision:	Linda	Dale	Jim	Christy	John	Comments
FARM						
Crop plan	R	C	C	I		
Seed purchase	R	C		I		
Chemical purchase	R	C		I		
Planting			C		R	
Scouting			C		R	

1. Make a list of the major task areas in running your business. Be sure you cover all the functional areas, e.g. production tasks, office recordkeeping, finance. You see the beginning of a typical crop production list above.
2. For each task define who is:
 - a. **Responsible (R)**: Individual who completes or manages the completion of the task
 - b. **Consulted (C)**: Individual who provides input on the completion of the task, whose expertise or buy-in is needed.
 - c. **Informed (I)**: Individual who needs to be aware of the completion of the task because it will affect his/her own work.
3. In the context of letting go, think through what assignments need to change. The person "letting go" needs to transition to being *Consulted*, and later *Informed*, rather than *Responsible*. Create a version that's current and a version that's 1, 2, or 3 years from now. Who is now *Responsible*?
4. Reflect on what it means to be *Consulted* for you. How will you provide guidance and correction when needed, without taking over or dictating?
5. Define what training is needed for the person becoming *Responsible*, and build a specific plan to make sure that is happening.

Going through this RCI process usually has multiple benefits. It brings areas of ambiguity or conflict-inducing overlap into focus for clear definition. And it paves the way for a specific discussion of exactly how "letting go" will happen.



Faith and Family Business: Jesus and Succession Planning

Dr. Bill Long

“You are the ones who have remained with me in my trials,” Luke 22:28

Both Lance and Davon have emphasized the importance of planning and even working through the nuts and bolts of “handing off” the family business to others. They are surely right. An issue that has long occupied my thinking is how the movement around Jesus, which was seemingly so scattered and on the defensive in the last week of Jesus’ life, could rise up and become not just an example of a successful transition, but probably the most impressive example of that in history? Was there any “succession planning” going on?

Answers to that question invoking the miraculous are commonplace. For many, the Church grew because “God ordained it,” or words to that effect. But that approach eliminates the question almost before it can be asked. So, my question remains. Was there any indication that Jesus was doing some of his own ‘succession planning’ before his death?

The verse cited above from Luke’s Gospel gives us the slightest hint of an answer. In Luke 22 Jesus gathered with his disciples in preparation for celebrating the Passover Meal. Then the disciples decided to have a discussion on who was greatest among them, to which Jesus responded with an emphasis on servanthood. Then, Jesus said, “You are the ones who have remained with me in my trials.”

In the midst of a seemingly deal-breaking discussion (about greatness), Jesus was able to focus on what they had in common. The disciplines had seen Jesus in his “trials”--when Jesus was questioned by religious authorities, criticized by people who didn’t understand or, now, pursued by foes. That they remained with Jesus gave him the confidence that they would know what to do when he was gone. Never underestimate the knowledge gained by simply observing and “staying around”. . .

