

# Speak Up

*Some management scenarios call for saying more, not less.*



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## Family businesses are simultaneously full

of emotion and silence. The intense feelings of love, frustration, pride, conflict or disappointment we feel toward family members with whom we work, while occasionally erupting in heated shouts or congratulatory hugs, more often are met with quiet. But, often what is needed is more rather than fewer words.

Don't misunderstand me: Silence in some cases is appropriate. Proverbs 10:19 tell us that, "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but the one who restrains speech is wise." There are many instances of family brokenness that trace back to something one said out of anger. Knowing when to stay silent is just as important as knowing when to speak up.

Now may be the time for you to speak up in your family enterprise. If the following scenarios fit your business, I would encourage you to consider saying more instead of less.

### INTENTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE

Often, there is silence regarding the parents' intentions about passing down the ranch or farm. Will it be gifted? When? Will it go equally to all the kids, or will the on-farm heir get preferential treatment? It isn't easy for parents to talk about such things; issues of mortality, equality, legacy, retirement and financial security are bound up in the topic.

Not discussing intentions leaves the next generation guessing. That might be acceptable if no one returned to the farm. But, if a son or daughter has returned, his or her entire career and future security are also bound up in the conversation. Talking about the plan for the farm or ranch is critical to the next generation's financial and career choices. The long-term future of the farm hangs on the results of this dialogue.

### APPRECIATION FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Perhaps because of bonds that transcend circumstances, families working in business together often take their relationships for granted. We expect family members to show up earlier, work harder, give more effort, take more ownership, stay later and stick with it—and they often do.

Because we think our family members will be there tomorrow, we often tell them what we don't like. Instead of expressing gratitude for their work or effort, we complain about what went wrong. We assume they will



be there tomorrow, so we think there will be time later to express our thanks. Of course, when they are not there tomorrow, because of frustration, burnout or a life-taking accident, we might wonder if they knew how much we appreciated their contribution.

*Operations should include family members in discussions about the future and recognition of contributions and skills.*

JIM PATRICO

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SKILLS

When we consider highly effective nonfamily employees, we often take care to thank them not just for their contributions but also for the special skills they bring that lead to success. We may acknowledge the way they lead by example, can fix almost anything or work extraordinary hours. We praise them, in part, because we want to retain them. We know how valuable they are and how difficult replacing them might be.

With family members, however, we often subconsciously think that because they are in the family, they will automatically, and forever, stay in the business without the same acknowledgment. The principles of praise that govern our interactions with key nonfamily staff don't seem to apply to family. We may treat them differently, but everyone, family included, likes to be acknowledged for his or her unique contributions.

Speaking up about the future brings the next generation certainty. Saying thanks demonstrates gratitude. And, acknowledging your family business partner's skills gives that person confidence in his or her abilities. Speaking rather than silence is often the right choice. ///