

Recipe For A Successful Return

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is sound. Let's briefly look at each of these three characteristics.

ENGAGED AND EFFECTIVE INDIVIDUALS. In some instances, children return to the family business out of a sense of obligation or guilt. In other cases, what they thought the return would be like—what they expected or were promised—hasn't come to fruition, and they're frustrated. That frustration or guilt, when not addressed, affects their level of engagement in the workplace. It's as if they have "checked out" but are still present. And when that happens, their effectiveness and the

A returning family member should be competent, engaged and mentally strong to help the business grow and prosper.



LANCE WOODBURY

A source of family business pride is the fact that at least one relative, and sometimes several, have returned to work in the company. For those in agriculture, the return of the next generation represents a clear shot at a legacy: The operating business will—if all goes right—make it another generation.

But will all go well? There are many challenges to overcome. First, the experience of working side by side with family isn't always pleasant. Second, generational differences in communication, work style and work/life balance can bring additional problems. A third source of tension can be different expectations of what constitutes good job performance. This can be compounded by other problems, such as low individual self-esteem or a lack of self-awareness of certain family members or their spouses. If not addressed (or inadequately addressed), one or a combination of these issues can spell the downfall of the business or even the destruction of the family.

To simply say that your adult children have jobs in the business is only, at best, a surface-level indicator of your success. The real test is whether they are engaged and effective in their roles, whether they are contributing to the team and whether their sense of self, and their mental health,

performance of the business begin to suffer.

TEAM CONTRIBUTORS. How do you rate team dynamics in your business? Specifically, how do family members help, or hurt, the team? Sometimes, conflict can stem from a family member not having the knowledge or skills to fulfill his or her role. Other times, because of their status as "family," they are expected to lead and manage, but haven't had the appropriate training to do so. Unresolved differences in philosophy or style between family members and key employees mess up the team. If the team is not working well, the likelihood of sustained success in your business is limited.

INDIVIDUAL WELL-BEING. At some point in our lives, we all struggle with doubt and self-confidence. We go through periods where we are unaware of the pain we might be causing others. We often seek to affirm our performance through extrinsic feedback, such as praise, compensation or profits. And in darker times, we compare ourselves to others, feeling as if success is a zero-sum game in which my recognition must come at the expense of someone else's. If this describes you or someone in your family business, find ways to connect. Have the difficult but honest conversations about individual mental health. Let people know you are concerned about them, and reach out when you see someone struggling. Ignoring the issues won't make them go away.

The return of a family member to the business, while seemingly a sign of success, often conceals many potential pitfalls. Success is more than a family member returning. Success is the return of a healthy, competent and engaged family member who helps your family business grow and develop. ●

Write Lance Woodbury at Family Business Matters, 2204 Lakeshore Dr., Suite 415, Birmingham, AL 35209, or email lance@agprogress.com