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“One thing only can release us from the grip of our history. That one thing is forgiveness.”

— LEWIS SMEDES

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

ownership, offer plenty of opportunities to worry.

But worrying is something we choose to do, and it can make us miserable. Being clear about the things we can affect, and the things we cannot, is a first step to letting go of the worry that crowds our lives.

WHETHER YOU COMMUNICATE. An oft-repeated, but frequently harmful statement in a family business is that “no news is good news.” Family members operate on assumptions and take the future for granted based on past experiences, seldom talking about important or necessary changes. Yet in many families, especially where assets are transitioning from parents (a couple) to several sibling children, there is no family road map for the future. How will transitions happen? How should land be divided? Should those who returned be treated the same as those who left?

Families—often parents—choose not to discuss the future due to a lack of clarity

or fear of conflict, and the very act of not communicating almost guarantees there will be a struggle. But you are in control of how we communicate, and talking about the future is a crucial element of family business success.

WHETHER YOU FORGIVE. You cannot operate as a family business without unintentionally hurting or being hurt by a family member or their spouse. Family interactions are too frequent, management styles are too varied, and the different ways each person handles frustration and stress is bound to create pain and disappointment.

When you are hurt by someone else’s words or behaviors, you have choices and you have control over how you respond. You make a choice about whether you will forgive the other person. A Protestant theologian, Lewis Smedes, wrote “One thing only can release us from the grip of our history. That one thing is forgiveness.” I often see family members consumed by their history of family conflict, and the choice they have—a choice that is admittedly difficult—is to forgive those who have caused them pain.

Farming and ranching are businesses hard-wired with uncertainty. When you are more thoughtful about what you choose to worry about, when you communicate about the future, and when you choose to forgive, you exercise control over some of the most important influences on your family business.

The Illusion and Reality of Control

Family farms need to put more emphasis on guiding the hard-to-manage areas of their operations.

As recent hail and thunderstorms moved through our western Kansas community, I was reminded of how little farmers and ranchers control some of the key factors in their business. Not only the weather, but talk of tariffs, the impact of immigration policies, rising interest rates, commodity market volatility and changing consumer preferences are all critical issues affecting businesses. When you consider how much money is tied up in land, equipment, inventory and growing crops, farming and ranching are risky businesses indeed.

Despite the many elements outside of their control, however, successful farmers I know focus on things they can control, such as efficiency, conservation, soil fertility, plant health and risk management tools, to name a few. Yet there are some hard-to-manage areas of life that we all could do better at controlling. Consider the following:

WHETHER YOU WORRY. The Catholic theologian Henri Nouwen, writing in his book “Making All Things New,” suggests that “Our individual as well as communal lives are so deeply molded by our worries about tomorrow that today hardly can be experienced.” In addition to our occupations (our jobs), our pre-occupations (our worries) have come to dominate our lives, leaving little room for experiencing daily joy. Family businesses, with their intermingling of family relationships with business management and asset

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