

# Mind Over Matter

*"I never made a mistake in my life. I thought I did once, but I was wrong."*

—Charles M. Schulz

**Years ago, I began to see** similarities in how individual members of different family businesses were wired. For example, some family business members constantly thought about growth, which often helped capture new opportunities but sometimes created financial challenges. Other family members would never expand the business and were totally risk-averse.

Some family members saw themselves being owed by their parents, while others made absolutely no claims on a future inheritance. Some parents avoided discussion of difficult topics at all costs, while other family members approached communication as a political chess match.

## COMMON MIND-SETS

Below are a few of the common family business mind-sets I see as I counsel with families. Which mind-set do you hold? Which mind-sets do you see in others?

► **The Victim:** The victim in the family business is the member who, despite claiming every effort to “do the right thing,” constantly complains their family members, employees or even vendors are out to get him or her. They seldom acknowledge the negative impact they have on others through their communication or workplace behavior, instead pointing to other’s actions as the root of all problems.

► **The Opportunist:** The opportunist in the family business (aka the “wheeler-dealer”) is the person always moving to the next project or opportunity, sometimes without a demonstrated track record of success on current or past projects. Some of the projects may be very valuable to the business, while others are a waste of time and effort. But, by the time the verdict is in, they are usually on to the next deal.



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► **The Entitled:** Entitled family members often think they have a right to something of value in the organization, which could be ownership of an asset, an amount of compensation or a position or level of responsibility in the business. When a family member working in the business expresses such entitlement to non-family staff, the culture of the business suffers due to an absence of perceived fairness. They may also act on their sense of entitlement, which can put the business at risk.

► **The Denier:** The denier is the family member who refuses to admit a problem most others see or who refuses to address the challenge even when they acknowledge it exists. I most often see this “ostrich effect” in parents who refuse to accept the difficulty their family has in working together or in recognizing the likelihood of future conflict.

► **The Politician:** In family businesses with many members, the politician is constantly looking to satisfy his agenda by using individual communication and alliance-building. Working behind the scenes to move the family in a particular direction sometimes has positive effects for the business, but these tactics can create distrust and often “keep the pot stirred.”

► **The Mediator:** The mediator in many family businesses is often Mom, though it sometimes can be the middle child or even a spouse, or in-law. They strive to bridge the differences between family members. When there are family members naturally at odds, the mediator helps reduce the tension. But, the constant act of being in the middle also wears out the mediator, causing occasional stress, depression or retreat.

## RECOGNITION IS KEY

Not every member wears the same hat all the time, and most of the mind-sets have both positive and negative dimensions. The key to a successful family business is to recognize when your own mind-set is either helping or preventing the growth of the family and business. ///



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