

Building Blocks Of Relationships

This practical advice can help create better connections with family business partners.



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While spring is a time for planting, and fall

is a time for harvesting, the winter months offer an opportunity to interact differently with family and business partners. The time spent inside working on financial and business planning, or in the shop working on equipment, or just hanging out with your family during the holidays are chances to nurture the relationships that sustain your family business.

Just like you need knowledge and skills to grow a crop or raise an animal, you also need knowledge and skills to improve your relationships. In her book “Getting Relationships Right,” Melanie Joy reminds us of the building blocks of good relationships. Consider the following fundamentals as you improve your bonds in the family business.

SECURITY

You feel secure in a relationship when the other person is attentive to your needs, is kind and considerate and is not out to harm you. You may still have difficult conversations or conflicts, but these arise from the care rather than hostility you feel toward one another. If a sense of security between family or team members is absent, it will be difficult to build a relationship of any kind.

CONNECTION

The bond we feel toward another can have many components. From a romantic bond between spouses to a philosophical connection between people who share similar beliefs, the sense that we have something in common sets the stage for a relationship. You may have a shared sense of humor, enjoy similar kinds of experiences or hobbies, have a historical connection or perhaps enjoy the bond created through stimulating conversation.

If you lack this kind of connection with a family member or in-law, I encourage you to take a trip or find an event to experience together, or jointly read and discuss a book or a podcast. Even the experiences

of volunteering or giving money together provide an opportunity for family members to bond.

TRUST

Because of the intimate knowledge family members have of one another and with the confidential financial information in a family business, trust is critical to relationships on the family farm or ranch. What often causes distrust among family members is a feeling that one or both parties have not honored an agreement.

For example, keeping information private, consulting a partner before a key decision or including someone in an event, activity or conversation are some of the expectations we have in a family business. However, many of these agreements are often implied and not discussed openly beforehand. People find out after an infringement that an agreement has been violated or trust damaged. Then, they need to rebuild. And, rebuilding trust is hard work.

INTEGRITY

Joy suggests integrity is not just a value we hold but a practice, a set of behaviors. Integrity is practiced by demonstrating, through compassion or kindness, that you care about the well-being of others—they have “worth” to you. Integrity is also demonstrated by treating people in a way they feel is fair—that their thoughts and efforts are considered by you in your interaction and decisions. Other values and behaviors, such as honesty and courage, help complete the sense we have that someone is acting with integrity. A family business in which members question one another’s integrity is likely headed for dissolution.

Being family does not guarantee a good relationship. In fact, because we are family, we often take the relationship for granted. Take the time to care for and tend to the relationships with your family members and their spouses this winter, and you will reap the harvest of a more positive family and business in the future. ///



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