



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

# ADDICTION

## In the Family Business

Every farmer or rancher can point to a neighbor, friend or even their own family to see the disastrous effects of substance abuse and addiction. It ruins families and destroys businesses, and often shows up in successive generations, leaving a stain on the family legacy.

The causes of addiction by our loved ones are not easy to isolate. According to the Cleveland Clinic, 40 to 60% of addiction cases have a genetic component: If someone in your family suffered from a substance or behavioral addiction, it's more likely to occur in other family members. Addiction is also closely linked with mental health conditions like depression and bipolar disorder.

Becoming addicted to harmful substances or behaviors can also be a response to stressful situations. For example, a childhood experience of severe conflict or physical or sexual abuse might lead to addiction. Stressful family or marital relationships can be a contributor. And, difficult business, career or medical circumstances can lead to responses of drug and alcohol abuse, including opioids, or behavioral addictions such as gambling, eating disorders, excessive shopping or pornography.

The family business can be a place where these historical and stress factors collide. Generational relationships are intertwined with the pressures of the workplace. People who grew up together, with all their patterns of interaction and beliefs about one another, live and work in close proximity. Married couples have limited outlets to express family or work frustrations, and often get caught in a spiral of negative thinking. Some would say you cannot “escape” your family. Add to that the dynamics of living and working in a small

town, where you can also feel constrained, judged and constantly observed.

Top that off with the pressure and stress of keeping a farm and ranch running. Low margins, a lack of control over prices, constant work and a lack of help, difficult weather, crop or animal diseases—the list can seem overwhelming. Plus, the pressure of keeping the business intact for the next generation—or guilt if the business is failing—can have a major influence on one's mental condition.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, it's important to remember that “addiction doesn't happen from having a lack of willpower or as a result of making bad decisions.

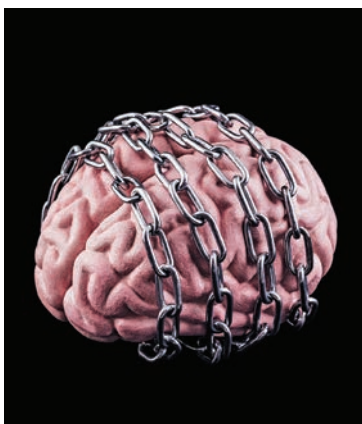
Your brain chemistry changes with addiction.” In other words, changing course is not simply a matter of quitting the detrimental substance or the injurious behavior. The person's brain has changed, and the effects of the harmful behavior have become a reward. The addicted person knows they are hurting themselves and others, but the feeling from the substance or behavior is overpowering.

If you sense a loved one is suffering from addiction, you should not wait to address the issue. The sooner you deal with it, the better. However, accusing or lecturing them is not helpful.

Instead, let them know how you are feeling and that you are concerned for them. Tell them you understand addiction is a chronic disease, not a function of their “bad choices,” as judging them will not help. (Try to deal with your own anger apart from them.) Listen empathetically to their fears, concerns or complaints. Assure and commit to them that you will be

there through the hard path of recovery.

The family business may or may not be the cause of addiction, but there is no doubt that being in business with family members shapes the trajectory of addiction. Stressful relationships, childhood experiences of trauma or conflict, and difficult financial or business circumstances—combined with an addictive nature—create a threat to both lives and livelihoods. Don't wait to deal with this disease in your own family or family business. ///



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