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“Dedication” is a word with positive connotations

in society. Quotes from coaches, business leaders, performance artists or almost anyone who has overcome obstacles or worked hard to achieve success mention the concept of dedication. People are dedicated to their work, their faith, their organizations, their craft, suggesting commitment and focus by people who are undeterred in their efforts.

Dedication is often expected, and prized, on farms and ranches. Dedication takes the shape of long days working in the field or shop, of spending several hours in the evening on financial and management records in the office. Dedication means driving hundreds of miles to pick up parts or cooking for hours to prepare harvest meals. Dedication is receiving, shipping or caring for livestock in the middle of the night while everyone else sleeps. Dedication is apparent in the family member working long after all the non-family team members have gone home.

Dedication is also evidenced in the financial sacrifice made to keep the business going during lean times or major setbacks. That means cutting back on business expenses, not purchasing new equipment or postponing important capital improvements. It can also mean spending less as a family, selling some personal assets or taking an off-farm job to help with income or obtain benefits like health insurance.

Dedication can also mean sacrificing part of the business to save the whole company, such as selling some land or equipment, or nonessential assets to shore up the balance sheet or improve working capital. That is a difficult move often accompanied by a sense of failure, for who doesn't feel bad about selling a piece of land that took years to acquire? But, it comes down to a relatively simple question: Am I willing to downsize now to have the opportunity to keep farming another day?

Can a person be too committed to the family business? Can dedication to a business come at the expense of other important parts of one's life?

Let's also look at the dark side of dedication. There are many people who, as kids, experienced one or both parents focusing almost exclusively on the business to the detriment of the family. The parents missed important events or spent little time with them. Everything revolved around the business. While they may not have experienced a terrible childhood by most standards, they feel something was missing in the early years of the family relationship.

There are also physical or mental consequences. A person who is overly dedicated to the business can suffer from exhaustion or injuries, from a poor diet or a lack of physical activity. Battling for business survival or being trapped in a constant cycle of family drama can harm one's mental health.

Overdedication can cause one to keep pursuing a business in decline because of economic conditions, industry consolidation or geographic location. It's difficult to know when to leave a business behind, to turn one's dedication to new frontiers for the family business.

Two ideas pair well with the concept of dedication. One is the notion of balance, of appropriately dividing your time and energy between the important areas of your life: work, health, family, friends and faith. Are you able to “spread” your dedication across these categories?

The second idea is accountability. Is there someone in the family or a close mentor, someone you trust and listen to, who will call you out if you are “out of balance” or in denial of obvious business or family problems?

Dedication is a strength in the family business. But a strength taken to extremes can also be a weakness. Consider your level of dedication to the family and business, and determine where you need more, or perhaps less, to achieve your goals. ///



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