

# Improve Communication In Your Family Business

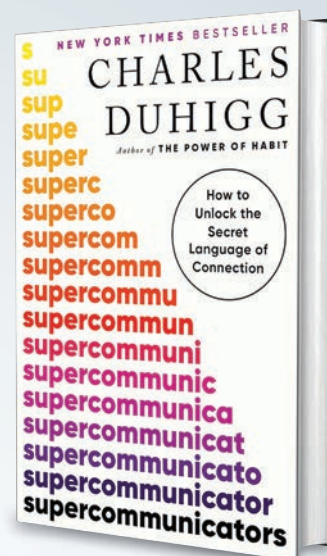
**O**n almost every family farm or ranch I know, a recurring frustration revolves around communication. Despite a rich history, people frequently miscommunicate or misunderstand one another. They assume that everyone else knows certain pieces of information or that we shouldn't have to waste time in meetings. But, to put it bluntly, I've never met a family business suffering from too much communication.

Charles Duhigg, in his 2024 book “Supercommunicators,” takes an in-depth look at why people are great at communicating. While reading, I thought of the conversational challenges in family businesses and how many family members can benefit from taking a fresh look at how they talk with, and listen to, others. Here are some tips to help conversations go better.

➤ **Recognize the three conversations.** When you are talking with someone, three different types of conversations can occur. The first kind of conversation is practical, using what Duhigg refers to as a “decision-making mindset.” It happens when we are making decisions or plans, or solving a specific problem. An example might be a conversation planning out the day or the week on the farm, or a meeting with the accountant to talk about tax issues or estate planning.

The second kind of conversation is about how people feel and uses an “emotional mindset.” If you've ever tried to solve a problem for someone when all that person wants is for you to understand how he or she feels, you understand the distinction. There isn't a decision to be made; it's more of a chance to express or hear how someone is experiencing life. Discussing someone's beliefs, memories or opinions tends to elicit emotional conversations.

The third conversation uses a “social mindset” and is focused on belonging and identity. Examples might include talking about your identity as a farmer to someone on a plane or gossiping about in-laws or other family members (which isn't necessarily healthy but is an example of a belonging-based conversation). Identifying who you know in common or discussing regional, political or sports-related similarities or differences are all examples of identity-based conversations.



Duhigg suggests good communication occurs when people are having the same type of conversation. Problems arise, however, when people are not having the same kind of discussion but think they are. To help you align, here are several best practices of supercommunicators.

➤ **Ask questions.** The best communicators ask questions and are curious and sincere about the answers people give. When someone asks you a good question, you sense they are interested in you, and the experience of talking to them is a positive experience. You almost lose track of time in giving your answer.

➤ **Notice emotions.** The best communicators notice how the other person is feeling. They might even name it: “You sound angry” or “Are you sad about that?” When people sense how you feel and show they understand that feeling, you feel deeply heard. If you happen to name the wrong emotion, don't worry. They will correct you without even thinking about it, and it will still register that you are listening deeply.

➤ **Confirm what you see and hear.** Summarizing what the other person says then asking if you've got it right demonstrates that you are listening. If both parties are doing this, it makes conversations go great. It facilitates “matching” between participants, which is a core scientific principle suggesting good communication is occurring.

As you think about an upcoming discussion, what type of conversation do you want to have? Ask questions, notice emotions and summarize the other person's words and feelings. We can all become better communicators, and doing so will make our family businesses immeasurably better. ///



Email Lance Woodbury at [lance.woodbury@pinionglobal.com](mailto:lance.woodbury@pinionglobal.com)