



Urban C. Lehner Vice President, Editorial

Forgiveness Can Be Good For Business

The inspirational speaker at the Young Farmer Awards lunch at our Ag Summit in Chicago was Lance Woodbury, a DTN columnist who ranks among the nation's top family-business mediators. His topic echoed the theme of his new book, "The Enduring Legacy: Essential Family Business Values."

What impressed me most was Lance's discussion of "the value of forgiveness" in resolving family-business conflicts. I particularly remember the quote from Louis B. Smedes: "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner is you."

Forgiveness, in other words, is as good for the soul of the person doing the forgiving as for the one forgiven. In a farm family business potential reasons for feeling wronged lurk in every corner. Failure to forgive can convert what should be loving relationships between brother and sister or parent and child into estrangement.

But it isn't just the soul that benefits from forgiveness. As befits someone who has both a masters in conflict resolution and an MBA, Lance was quick to point out that forgiveness can be good for business. As he put it in the book, "I've watched family business partners or spouses hold on to anger, resentment and business so deeply that they are totally ineffective in moving the business forward." They miss opportunities. They lose the will to continue.

To forgive is not to forget. Lance quoted Smedes again: "A healed memory is not a deleted memory. Instead, forgiving what we cannot forget creates a new way to remember. We change the memory of our past into a hope for our future."

Forgive me for plugging a friend, but I think Lance is on to something. If you're interested, his website, www.lancewoodbury.com, has other passages from his book.

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