

The Family Business: Encouraging Children to Join

The question of whether to encourage your children to continue the tradition of the family business is an age-old one—one that doesn't seem to get easier with time. There are several issues to consider, and not all are clear-cut. Outlined below are some of the issues that should be considered.

What is best for your children?

Many parents believe that building a business is a means of security for the children who may someday take over the company. They may even say to their children, "I'm starting this for you." This often begins before it is apparent what the child's aptitudes and interests are.

Some children may find it appealing and secure to have an automatic position within a good company. However, many children also find it oppressive, as though they aren't given the opportunity to explore their own interests.

Until children are old enough to research their interests and be evaluated on their likely contribution to the family business, the question of what is best for the child is hard to determine.

What is best for the business?

Just because an individual comes from the same family doesn't mean that he or she will be prepared for the tasks of the organization. As with any new employee, you should evaluate the individual. Is he or she qualified? Does he or she have enthusiasm for the position being considered? If not, you'll be setting your child up to fail and putting your business at risk.

What is best for the family?

Family is often a comfort for people having difficulty at work. When family and work involve the same people, the refuge is gone.

Many family businesses find it helpful to try to separate business time from family time so that business issues aren't discussed during family outings or get-togethers. It's difficult to enforce but may be a good way to keep the business from interrupting family time.

Ultimately, a person's choice of career should be up to that person. A family business can give children an opportunity to experience different aspects of work while they are deciding what career avenues to explore. Many families require their children to work somewhere else before officially joining the family business.

This has several important benefits. First, the children learn to rely on themselves to find and keep jobs. Their confidence will increase as a result. Second, they will see how different businesses operate, which can help bring new ideas into the family business at a later time. Third, they will have the opportunity to explore other career choices and find positions that truly excite them. This may mean never joining the family business, but it may ultimately be the best choice for some people.

In the end, create opportunities, but allow the child to make the ultimate decision.

Davis & Hodgdon Associates offers many family business services. We understand their unique requirements and have years of experience collaborating with family businesses to reach their goals. For more information call 802-878-1963.



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