

NEXT GENERATIONS

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Every family owned business has to face this question at some stage “how are we going to get out”? For some the answer is simple, just sell it. Others however can have a huge emotional attachment or the business may be so big it isn't easy to sell. Many wineries fit into this latter category.

The wine industry brings out the passion in people like few other industries can. Being a rural sector there are a variety of risks and these add to the emotion of owning a winemaking business. It is very difficult to separate personal life from work life when you have absolutely everything (all of your money, often your home and

normally plenty of debt) tied up in one asset.

Another obvious way to exit a business is to pass it on to the next generation and this can have significant pitfalls if it isn't handled correctly, each sibling needs to be treated fairly to avoid a huge family bust-up in future years.

One wine company that has

been quietly thinking about the next stage is Seifried Estate in Nelson. When I spoke with Anna Seifried she asked me why I wanted to use them as an example of handing over a business to the next generation because they aren't doing anything special.

I have known the Seifried family for many of the 40 years they



The epitome of a family business, the Seifrieds, from left; Anna, Heidi, Chris, Agnes and Hermann.

have been in business and have watched it grow from a small producer in the Upper Moutere Village to the large enterprise it now is. Anyone who knows Hermann and Agnes Seifried will know of their huge capacity for work and this work ethic has been passed on to their children, Heidi, Chris and Anna.

Agnes says while they always hoped the kids would stay involved she and Hermann also knew they had to find their own way in life and come back to the family business if and when they were ready. Obviously having grown up with jobs to do around the vineyards and winery there was a high likelihood they would return; they already had an emotional connection.

And that is the Seifried secret to handing over the business to the next generation. The children have always been part of and are

fully integrated into it. A real key to the success of Seifried's business is that the children didn't just walk into a job in the winery when they left school. Instead they all went to university and then onto jobs with other companies. Heidi's first qualification was as a dental surgeon an industry she worked fulltime in for three years. She then went back to Lincoln University where she completed her Post Grad Diploma in Viticulture and Oenology.

She still spends some time honing her dentistry skills on a part time basis while juggling a young family and working in the family business four days a week.

Chris has a winemaking qualification from Charles Sturt University, as well as a Post Grad Diploma in Marketing from Lincoln University, and has worked in wineries in Australia, USA, Austria and France. He came back to New

Zealand for a harvest at home in 2001, and has been a major part of the family business ever since. In 2007 he enrolled for the Ice House Owner Manager Programme.

Anna has a Marketing Degree from Otago, as well as a Post Grad Diploma in Wine Marketing from Adelaide University. She spent a few years in Australia working with Coles Myer, before returning home in 2003 to work alongside Agnes in sales and marketing.

Since the early 2000's the Seifried children have all drifted back into working fulltime for the business, bringing loads of experience with them.

Given Seifried's was going through a significant growth phase at the time, building and relocating into a new winery complex and significantly increasing vineyard area; the children had real jobs to come back to, not just jobs created for them.

Another key to Hermann and Agnes making sure the business is in good hands in the future is that none of the Seifried family have job titles on their business card. If a job needs doing it gets done and if that means Anna, who deals with much of the marketing and administration with Agnes, has to spend some time on the bottling line she does – "it's a good opportunity to make sure we all know our own business inside out" says Anna.

Everyone in the family has a role representing the business in the market place.

Hermann and Agnes can rightly be proud of what they have created and that their family will continue that legacy. They now can have confidence to spend more time with their grandchildren, knowing the company will continue to prosper – even so, don't use the 'retire' word around Hermann. ■
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