



The Family Operation

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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I have a lot of clients who come to see me because of problems arise when family members work together in businesses or farming operations. This is an area that I can relate to as I have three children, all of whom have been involved in my private practice over the years.

Here are some of the areas that might cause concern:

1. Defining leadership - Sometimes there is competition regarding who is going to be "the boss", especially when siblings are involved. A parent who has established the business might be hoping that s/he can semi-retire or retire. Even if members of next generation have the ability to continue the work, there isn't any guarantee that it will flourish - especially if the parties involved are not working as a team. Your job is to mentor and direct those involved until the ones who are taking over can assume all the tasks involved with efficiency and mutual respect.

2. Making changes - Because I have worked so hard to build my business, I can appear to be stubborn about trying new ways to do things. Most owners have experienced failures or inefficiencies and therefore feel that over time they have learned the best strategies to grow and maintain operations. Sometimes what we do works but could still be done better! We can be outdated or naive. I remember the day that my two sons sat me down and convinced me to set up online booking and to accept credit cards. I agreed to try these for one month only but was shocked at how both were received positively by my clients and saved both time and money for my staff. Thank heavens they were persistent. We need to be cautious but also open to new ideas.

3. Setting boundaries - When am I the mother and when am I the "boss"? This is one of the hardest things to sort out in both farming and business operations, especially if there are extended family members involved. Living on a farm, for example, is not the same as having a nine to five job where you punch a time clock. There needs to be a balance of work and fun for all generations. Clear communications are very important when it comes to both defining and managing boundaries.

4. Holding onto resentments - In any business enterprise it is always easier to hire a person from the "outside". His/her resume outlines their achievements and not their negative traits or history. Also, when hiring an "outsider" there isn't the emotional tie that you have with family members so it can be easier to give directions, confront and, if necessary, terminate the person's position. When you are working with family members, you cannot bury problems but instead need to confront them and come to a resolution or at least agree to disagree. Then the individuals involved have to be able to "let go" of the issue. That isn't always easy and hiring a professional therapist or mediator can help with this.

It is sad when grandparents and parents invest their lives into businesses for their children only to find out that the next generation isn't interested or able to get along well enough to carry on.

You cannot force your dreams onto others or make them do it your way. You also cannot pass the torch to them and then take it back over and over again or criticize the way that they choose to run with it.

Those who have positive family operations usually have clear communications, boundaries, and procedures. They also have learned to be open to new ideas and deal with their relationships with maturity and respect.