



Transition... Transaction... Transformation

As most of you know, much of FBC's work centers around the transition of leadership from one generation to the next. How will your family business achieve a SUCCESSFUL SUCCESSION from, say the FOUNDER to the FOLLOWER(S)?

We “coach” clients in the areas of CONFLICT, COMMUNICATION, and CULTURE.

As part of our initial client “homework,” family business folk are asked to read William Bridges’ white paper entitled, “Getting Them Through The Wilderness.”

<https://wmbridges.com/resources/transition-management-articles/getting-them-through-wilderness/>

Bridges says that every transition involves three parts, which must be taken in order: an ending, a neutral zone and a new beginning. I recommend reading the white paper if you’d like to dig deeper.

Over time, my experience has led me to piggyback on Bridges’ work.

Here are a few (8) of my observations after a decade and a half of this work...

1. Everyone wants a “smooth” transition.
2. A smooth transition is an unrealistic expectation. “Good” transitions are universally HARD.
3. Make no mistake. You WILL do the hard work. You can “stack it” up front, OR, you can kick the can down the road. If you do the latter the hard work will be harder. Either way, you will do the hard work.
4. Back to expectations... when expectations are unrealistic, disappointment on the part of one or many is unavoidable.
5. (Parenthetically, I’m having more and more family businesses come to me “too late,” after so much conflict has occurred that familial discord seems irreparable. And, that’s hard for me to say/write. One client called me “the conductor on the HOPE train.” I don’t give up hope easily... HOWEVER, family business is worth FIGHTING for; it’s not worth DYING for... Word to the wise: DON’T WAIT to address the issues that eventually MUST be addressed!)
6. Understand that there is a DIFFERENCE between a TRANSITION and a TRANSACTION. If you, as the founder, signed the paperwork to transfer shares in your company to the next generation, you completed a TRANSACTION. The TRANSITION may take years... You, as founder, may not be ready to step away completely. That’s OK. The “dance” of TRANSITION will take time... usually longer than you originally thought. Learn to dance without stepping on each other’s toes.
7. As one founder said to me:

**“Mark, I’ve got one shot at this.
Help me do it right.”**

If you want to do it “right,” pay attention to a few things:

- a. Discover your true IDENTITY. It’s NOT the business you started!
- b. You cast a large shadow. No one is at their best operating in your shadow.
- c. Per Frozen, “Let it go... Let it go.” You made mistakes. So will the next generation.
- d. Don’t make the NextGen group PLEASE you. There is a difference between HONORING and PLEASING...
- e. You WILL DISAGREE with some of the decisions NextGen makes. That’s OK. Don’t, under any circumstances, communicate DISAPPROVAL. There is a difference between those two words.
- f. Show NextGen how to do this “transition thing.” Before they know it, it will be their turn.
8. I believe all of us want to (and want those around us to) pursue our (their) BEST LIFE. To achieve that best life, change is necessary. As Russell Brand says (I shared this in February’s blog), **Change is possible! Hope is real!** Believe that... about others and about yourself...

True life change involves TRANSFORMATION.

Recently, we were with some friends and they served corned beef. I asked a question I’d never asked before: *What is corned beef?* They told me it’s brisket that’s been in a brine. Well, I love brisket... but I never imagined it could become corned beef. The brisket is TRANSFORMED into corned beef. How? By MARINATING in the brine for a long time. A client shared a lesson she was learning... She’d heard someone ask,

What are you marinating in?

If you want true TRANSFORMATION, pay attention to what you’re “marinating in.” You’ll be glad you did!