



Weaving the tapestry of your family business

You've probably all seen pictures of the reverse side of a tapestry. Just a bunch of knots and loose ends of thread. Fortunately, we can turn the tapestry over and see the beauty of the weaver's handiwork.

If only it were that easy when it comes to the "tapestry" of family business...

Most family businesses want to "weave" something beautiful.

Easier said than done. In my experience, far too often, we see the knots and the loose ends rather than the beauty.

The knots and the loose ends are things like conflicts, impasses, conversations that should be happening but aren't, and assumptions that often run wild.

Here's an example of a knot: One of the next generation (NextGen) doesn't like what his/her siblings are doing. Rather than getting the siblings together, he/she goes to Mom and Dad to tell his/her version of the story. Mom and Dad jump in the middle... I think you get it. KNOTS...

Loose ends: The Executive Team agrees that it's time to finally write up job descriptions. Time drags on and no one follows through. No one takes it on as their responsibility to get these done. Over time, conflict arises because someone steps into your "lane" and chastises someone you supervise.

So, it isn't hard to find examples of the tapestry wrong-side up.

Contrast this with a couple of examples of the beauty of a tapestry right-side up:

- The owners are at an impasse. Neither "side" wants to budge. HOWEVER, they stay at the table... and because they stay at the table and keep talking, over time one owner decides to YIELD. The dam is broken and the owners move forward into a new season, both as a business AND, more importantly, as a family!
- Two family members are at serious odds with one another. Neither their working relationship nor their personal relationship are going well... They "tolerate" each other at work since they "have to." Somehow, they finally agree to sit down and talk... and really begin to listen to one another. Not just listen to wait their turn to say their piece. They are listening attentively, to really understand the other person. Through the listening, clarifying and understanding, they find common ground. They have found a "beachhead" – a place they can drive a stake and begin to build a new future together. Again, "beauty" – for the business and the family.

No one said this would be easy. Most of what's valuable is gained through hard work, some level of discomfort (usually for everyone involved), and perseverance. As a wise man once told me:

AWARENESS precedes CHANGE... All CHANGE necessitates being UNCOMFORTABLE.

So, weave the beautiful tapestry of both business and family. It's worth all the pain and discomfort. In the end, you'll be glad you did!