

Good morning all –

I wanted to follow up on last week's program about boundaries. Many of you commented that while you thought the topic was great, the speaker (Jane Adams) could have given a few more take-away solutions for you and your family/business. Boundaries are an extremely important topic in a family business. When families work in business together, two different systems intertwine: the family system, and the business system. Boundaries can be blurry, and can interfere with the functioning and effectiveness of each system.

People have opposing needs: The very real need to be independent, their own person, their own decision maker, yet be part of a larger system that offers them safety, comfort, love, and acceptance. Those needs change on a daily basis! The most functional families, **and businesses**, are those that are neither too rigid nor too flexible. When boundaries are too rigid, meaning that individuals must act a certain way to be accepted into the family, the outcome may be stifling of thought. People can't be who they really are to be part of the family. No creativity is gained, and no individual growth is achieved. Families **and** businesses become stagnant. When boundaries are too flexible, people can become confused, anxious, or indecisive. One daughter was completely frustrated by her father's flexibility in dealing with employees. She told me there were never any rules. No one really knew how to operate in the system or was ever satisfied because there weren't any set structures. To her, it was maddening and an ineffective way to run a professional office. That's common when there is too much flexibility.

Boundaries can be as simple as physical space, such as standing too close to someone; walking into someone's (bedroom) office without knocking; going through someone's (bedroom)office drawers without permission; talking over someone; interrupting; avoiding; keeping the peace for peace's sake. Boundaries can also be extremely complex: personal thoughts on politics, religion; creating a way to solve a problem that's different than what has become the "norm"; understanding that each of you is just a bit (or a lot) different. The biggest mistake that people can make is not understanding that businesses, **and families**, are fluid. They change. Sometimes not right away, but over time.

Here are some suggestions:

1. **FLEXIBILITY:** As businesses grow in size, age, generation, leadership, the boundaries of the members often need to be changed. One of our members told us how he had to change the boundaries of his relations with his cousins in order to run a more professional business. Children grow up and so do businesses! They both need to change!!! We add/lose members to each of these systems by marriage, birth, death, hiring, firing and retiring! Nothing stays the same. **Re-evaluate!**
2. **VALUES:** Understand the difference between values and boundaries. Family businesses succeed because of shared values. Be open with your family members about what **each of you values** about being a part of your family. Ask the same question again at a different time at the business. Get a piece of paper, and ask what do **each of you value** about the business? Write them down and share them! Is it honesty? Fairness? Community? Make a list! Those are values, not boundaries!
3. **COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY:** Balanced families understand that they will disagree with each other at times, and that's healthy! Avoiding confrontation to keep the peace, or openly challenging someone at the office (because you do his at home) must be evaluated. If you don't know how you treat others within your family at work, ASK!
4. **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:** Develop and understand clear roles for your position in the company. Understand which "hat" you're wearing and when. This takes PRACTICE! Ask yourself repeatedly, am I the father or the boss, the daughter or the manager. Business disagreements are left at the office, and family disagreements are left at home. Work on your roles and responsibilities, and review them often.
5. **EMPOWERMENT:** Do not assume you know what someone's dreams and aspirations are because they're a member of the family! Encourage individuality, and be supportive! Hopes, dreams and fears are **individual**. When they become too shared, the system can become dysfunctional.

People need to have their own private thoughts: some about work, some about family. Individuals have their own secrets, and **that's okay!!** Ask yourself: Am I asking for information because I need to know? Who is that statement about, you or them?

6. **GOALS AND ACTION PLANS:** Strategic planning for the business and the family should be taken seriously. Family members must understand the vision and mission for the family and the business. Know the difference, and review often.
7. **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY:** Understand that it is your own responsibility to manage your boundaries. If someone does something you believe has been a violation of your boundary, then it is your responsibility to communicate that effectively. Is that easy? Maybe not, but with practice, you'll get better! A simple, "I need to set my boundary, and that is. . ." is a good way to start your statement. Married couples, parent/children, siblings, cousins, in-laws are all required to take responsibility for their own boundaries. One of our members told me about her situation with her father. She was upset about the person who was the manager of her department, and talked to her father about it. The father disciplined her manager, and this affected the daughter's ability to be a member of the team at work. She told me she learned to tell her father, "Dad, I need you to put on your 'Dad' hat and listen to me as a daughter, not an employee. Or "Dad, I need you to put on the boss hat, not the Dad hat." The daughter took responsibility for her own boundary!
8. **LOVE:** Do not confuse love and affection for lack of boundaries. A healthy love is when you recognize and respect each other's need to be independent, to have your own unique boundary that may be different from the person you love. A healthy love is also letting someone know their actions may not be okay and encroaching on your boundary.

I hope this was helpful. If you or your family need any more suggestions, or help with boundaries, I would be more than happy to talk with you, or give you some related readings. If you have any suggestions or stories you would like to share, please just respond to this email. This would be very helpful to others.

See you tomorrow at the Food for Thought! And don't forget to register for the next program on October 20 on Developing Your Next Generation Leaders!

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