Role and Influence of Women in Family Farm Transition

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Family like branches on a tree, we all grow in different directions, yet our roots remain.

Starting and growing business is not an easy task, ensuring its continuity is even more challenging!

• 70% of family businesses fail the transfer from one generation to the next, and 90% within 2 to 3 generations. (Williams & Preisser, 2003).
Why do transitions fail?

- Communication breakdown within the family unit – 60%
- Failure to prepare heirs – 25%
- Professional errors in accounting, financial, or legal advising – 3%
- Other factors (e.g., lack of joint family mission) – 12%


Key factors that distort communication during farm transition*

- Passive communication: implicitly understood or explicitly communicated?
- Delays in planning due to unresolved issues between family members (such as children’s career choices and their personal relationships)
- Lack of inclusion of younger generation in key discussions and decisions about the future of the farm.

Kaplan, Nussbaum, Becker, Fowler, Pitts. Communication Barriers to Family Farm Succession Planning, 2009.

• Passive Communication
• Unresolved Issues
• Lack of Inclusion

INABILITY TO CONNECT or BOND WITH OTHERS EFFECTIVELY!
Woman’s **unique influence** lies in the combination of roles she plays in a family business: a mother, a wife, and a business partner.

Cooks, cleans, does laundry & dishes, is a wife, mother, coach, and more than full time employee.

**Unique Innate Abilities of Women**

1. Wired to connect (Tannen, 2007; Hensley, 2009)
2. Have a strong intuition (Verma, 2013)
3. Able to effectively interpret nonverbal cues (Hall, 1975)
4. Women “read” other people emotions and express their own emotions better than men a.k.a. *Emotional Intelligence* (Fernandez-Berrocal et al. 2012)

**Men’s vs Women’s Brain**

*Photo credit: Ragini Verma et al, University of Pennsylvania.*
“Men engage the world as an individual in a hierarchical society (...) in which people try to achieve and maintain their upper hand if they can and thus, seek independence and status. (...) Women, contrary, approach the world as an individual in a network of connections (...) where people seek closeness and consensus.”

~Debora Tannen, “You Just Don’t Understand!”

“..... females are "wired" from birth to be especially sensitive to nonverbal cues or to be especially quick learners of such cues. This would make evolutionary sense, because nonverbal sensitivity on a mother’s part might enable her to detect distress in her youngsters or threatening signals from other adults, thus enhancing the survival chances of her offspring.” (Hall, 1975)

“Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify and manage your own emotions, and to pick up on the emotions of others, manage them, and in so doing, build trust, grow influence...”

~Margie Warrell, “Empowering braver leaders to play a bigger game”
“Women have an edge over men at expressing their emotions and understanding emotions of others, while men exceed at compartmentalizing emotions (or tuning out) so an upset in one area of brain doesn’t spill over into other areas...”

“Margie Warrell, “Empowering braver leaders to play a bigger game”

Women are better at emotional empathy (“feeling what others feel”), while men often may tune out from “feeling” into “finding a solution” mode.

“Dan Goleman, “Are women more emotionally intelligent than men?”

You don’t have to make a choice between two alternatives (e.g., being honest OR fair, maintaining family harmony OR farm), you can achieve BOTH.

BUT HOW?

Women Can Connect Family Members Through an Effective Dialogue!

Connecting Family Members Through an Effective Dialogue

• Use your emotional intelligence to navigate through the process
• Create a Shared Pool of Meaning to start free flow of views
• Understand who are “all the players in the game” and what their needs/wants/expectations are
• USE YOUR UNIQUE INFLUENCE, ABILITIES, and COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO CONNECT WITH FAMILY!
Practical Tools from Experts in the Field of Communication & Farm Transition

From “Emotional Intelligence: a Practical Guide”  
By Dr. David Walton, 2012

Key factors that can help further improve our emotional intelligence:

- Self-knowledge
- Managing your emotions
- Understanding others’ behaviors and feelings
- Managing your relationships

From “Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when Stakes are High”  
By Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler, 2012
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Create a Pool of Shared Meaning

1. Start with heart
2. Learn to look
3. Make it safe
4. Master my stories
5. State my path
6. Explore other paths
7. Move to action

Based on “Farming’s In-Law Factor” by Elaine Froese and Dr. Megan McKenzie.

Understand who are “all the players in the game” and what their needs/wants/expectations are

1. Wife, Mother, Mother-in-Law
2. Husband, Father, Father-in-Law
3. Son or Daughter, Spouse of your Daughter-in-Law or Son-in-Law
4. Daughter-in-Law or Son-in-Law, Spouse of your son or daughter.

According to Babikian (2006), a good transition adviser must:
(1) focus on “soft” issues, not only provide technical services
(2) recognize family dynamics factors
(3) look at human and social capital as a part of wealth to be transferred
(4) treat a whole family as their client, not only the individual who established the business
(5) understand and incorporate perspectives of both generations.

References


References


Books

"You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation." By Deborah Tannen.


"Farming’s In-Law Factor: How To Have More Harmony and Less Conflict on Family Farms". By Elaine Froese and Dr. Megan McKenzie.

"Emotional Intelligence: A Practical Guide". By Dr. David Walton.

"Crucial Conversations. Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High". By Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler.