

How to Fire a Family Member -- and Still Keep Your Family Together



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You decided to hire a brother, a sister, or maybe an in-law. Congratulations, you won brownie points with your parents, grandparents, or someone else whom you look up to. You also got some karma points for helping a family member out. You might be looking at it as a win-win, because you can really trust this person to do the right thing. After all, they are family, right?

At first, things look good. This family member is smart and dedicated, and has your trust. But after a little while, he starts to get too comfortable. You end up letting him get away with coming in late and leaving early. It feels as if you can't correct him if you want to maintain positive family relations.

Over time, things start getting more out of hand than you would like. He starts letting other employees down, taking advantage of the system, and making you look bad. People in your company begin questioning your judgment. And this is when it's time to assert your authority. After all, you are the boss and you need to make some decisions.

Here are a few practical steps that can help you make this uncomfortable process somewhat easier. While it will never be easy to discipline or fire a family member, these methods can help.

The first step is to write everything down. Sit down and create a list of pros and cons. What does he do really, really well? What does he do not so well? Is he a bad

fit for your company, or is he just in a role in which he cannot excel? Perhaps he's just in the wrong seat, and can be moved somewhere else. Or he might need coaching or mentorship. Once you have a clear list, run it by someone you trust and respect in your business, perhaps a partner or a fellow executive. Have them question the items you have on the list to make sure you that they agree, and to make sure that your personal ties aren't clouding your professional judgment.

Most people want to succeed. But when family member at your company starts to feel entitled and acts as though he is doing you a favor, the second step to rectify the problem is to establish some communication. You have to sit down with your employee in a calm, collected way and describe the problems you are facing. If you can't stay calm because there is too much emotion coming up, you might need someone to moderate the session. Take notes and write down what the family member says and how he feels. Hear him out—completely. Don't get defensive. Chances are that you have not communicated properly with this person in the past.

Once you understand the situation and you can see your employee's point of view, meet with someone outside of the situation to review what he said. You cannot make a good judgment call yourself—you are too close to the situation. Find a coach, mentor, or another entrepreneur to help you see what you might not be seeing. You might be able to come up with some solutions to your problem that are creative and that are a win for both parties. The key here is to find a way that you can either end this relationship or fix it with minimal damage to the family.

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Now that you have some creative solutions, review them with your employee. Show him that you care for him and that you are trying to find other solutions to help. If it is not an option for this person to continue working with you, you can help him find a new job. You could even lend him some money to open up his

own business. The key is to figure out what will really make him happy. Communication is very important. It's not always what you say, it's how you say it. Role-play and practice goes a long way. You can only do this once you understand your employee's point of view and what he or she wants in general. The last thing you want to do is assume you know what he wants. We all tend to make assumptions, and they often create conflict.

Finally, prepare to take action. The longer you wait, the worse it might get. You want to be brave and move forward. If it means taking away responsibilities to minimize the risk, do it right away. Once you show your family member that you are serious and have the courage to take action, the chances of them complying with your suggestions and offers of help will increase.

What strategies do you have to transition a family member? What experiences do you have in your business? Please share in the comments below.

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