

Using Accountability to Differentiate Your Family Business

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It's true! Accountability can be an excellent differentiator for families in business because it gives us a way to be authentic and explicit with each other in an environment that can be rife with complex communication dilemmas.

We define accountability as the "obligation or willingness to accept responsibility for one's actions." It's proactive, cooperative and, most importantly, relational. This means making expectations clear and checking in with each other along the way, instead of waiting to pounce when people do not meet said expectations. Being accountable also requires that you make a plan or commitment together. You need to agree on the answers to such questions as: What do we need to do? By when? How are we going to keep in touch about this? How can I support you?

Two skills or attributes that are critical to creating accountability are assertiveness and compassion.

Assertiveness

This is simply when you can say what you think and mean clearly and with conviction without beating around the bush. Assertiveness does not seem like behavior that is argumentative or antagonistic. Assertiveness is openhearted and direct. That does not mean that assertiveness always feels comfortable. In fact, many times it feels quite uncomfortable. Assertiveness assumes that what you think and feel "belongs" to you and what someone else thinks and feels "belongs to him/her." It assumes that both of you are worthy and deserving of information that you value.

Compassion

This is the act of connecting and understanding. It is essentially the feeling that arises when we are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering. Emotional intelligence research has shown that when we feel compassion, our heart rate slows down and we secrete many feel-good hormones such as oxytocin, serotonin and dopamine. Regions of the brain linked to empathy, caregiving and feelings of pleasure also activate, which can result in our wanting to approach and care for other people.

Being assertive and compassionate with each other as we devise ways to be accountable to one another can be the secret sauce in relationships. Because businesses that are owned by families often have more complex relational issues, the tool of accountability supported by the behaviors of assertiveness and compassion can be invaluable to both keeping a healthy family and a healthy business in balance.

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