

SKM Associates LLC

*Family Business Consulting
Developing High Performance
Leaders and Organizations*

It Is Inevitable – Conflict In The Family

There is no such thing as a family business without conflict at some point. What is the cause of conflict in a family business?

Though there is not one answer to that question for every situation or family business, we believe, based on our experience, the source of much conflict is misaligned expectations.

Each family member brings his or her own thoughts, ideas, experiences, definitions, interpretations, and perceptions. In many situations, there is an assumption that others just know what we mean, and we move forward acting on our own definitions or interpretations. These families take the greatest hits when change is necessary, or a critical decision must be made.

Because every family is going to have conflict, what is a family to do?

- Who you talk to is as important as what you say. Avoid Triangulation.
- As a family and as a business, consciously work on developing a culture of conflict resolution. Individually focus on developing conflict resolution skills.
- Work on the correct issue. Refrain from piling on with incorrect data or with issues from the past.
- Handle the right problem with the right person.
- Establish appropriate boundaries. Establish a balance between work life and family life.
- Be an example with your own communication. Practice good communication. Be quick to listen and slow to speak.
- Seek help. As a member of the family enterprise, find a coach to support you and your family in developing healthy communication habits and breaking the communication triangulation and cycle of conflict.

Only by addressing conflict directly will the cycle end. Families and their enterprises cannot thrive where communication habits undermine trust and credibility. Conflict is inevitable, but how you handle it is not.

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