

6 tips for running a successful family business



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America's more than 5 million family-owned businesses play a key role in fueling the nation's economy. Family-owned businesses employ 60%

of the U.S. workforce, create 78% of all new jobs and generate 64% of America's gross domestic product (GDP).

I have been at the helm of one of these family-owned businesses, U.S. Waterproofing (<https://www.uswaterproofing.com/>), for the last 21 years.

U.S. Waterproofing was founded in 1957 by my great Uncle Al and is currently a third generation family-owned business. U.S. Waterproofing has grown to be one of the largest basement waterproofing companies in the country and is one of the most recognized home service brands in Chicagoland area.

From the time I joined U.S. Waterproofing, I observed that the company's success stemmed from an ingrained culture that treats employees like family and continuously innovates while remaining true to the core values of the company.

While a strong company culture is foundational to the success of any business, there are several other factors I consider key to running a successful family business, including:

1. Listening to each generation

Family interrelations and generational differences can pose several challenges.

Successful family businesses recognize the importance of actively listening to and learning from each generation.

At U.S. Waterproofing, we have found that listening to all points of view

is a critical part of helping us improve processes and grow the business.

An approach which honors the experience of the older generation, respects the hierarchy and chain of command and leverages the skills and ideas of each generation is key to the success of any multigenerational family-owned business.

2. Treating employees like family

Employees come first at U.S. Waterproofing. Our company motto is that "if we take good care of our people, they in turn will take great care of our customers." This philosophy engenders employee loyalty and a shared sense of commitment -- major factors that contribute to a company's success. This family environment is why almost half of U.S. Waterproofing employees have been with the company for over a decade and why we have a committed team that has fixed more than 300,000 basements across the region over the last 63 years.

3. Continuing to evolve

Although rooted in tradition, it is essential for family-owned businesses to continue to evolve. After all, if you stop growing (or evolving) in business -- you die! One strategy for expansion is to offer new services.

For example, U.S. Waterproofing recently expanded with the launch of U.S. Remediation, a new professional commercial disinfection company in response to COVID-19.

Another way family-owned businesses can evolve is by embracing and leveraging technology.

These initiatives include our "Book Now" feature on our website, which

gives customers the ability to schedule their estimate online 24/7. In addition, we also have an online Learning Center with DIY tools and resources including hundreds of how-to-waterproof lessons.

4. Seeking outside advice

Seeking guidance from outside advisors can be a good way to inject fresh ideas into a family business. Joining a peer-to-peer leadership group, such as Entrepreneurs Organization (EO) or Young Presidents Organization (YPO) can broaden perspectives and provide a lot of inspiration.

Consulting with a business coach can also provide invaluable advice. Just ask Bill Gates!

5. Setting higher standards

Working for your family comes with a heightened level of expectations. Responsibilities and promotions are not an entitlement -- they must be earned. Let's face it, every employee and customer knows how you got your job. It's up to you to show why you deserve it!

6. Keeping it simple

When I took over at U.S. Waterproofing, my great Uncle Al always said how proud he was and to make sure I didn't screw it up (he actually used other choice words, but they can't be printed!).

My dad has also shared similar sentiments, providing me with such reminders as "don't overcomplicate a simple business."

No pressure, right? In the end it's really very simple: if you take care of

employees and customers, everything else will fall into place.

Family-owned businesses are the engine that helps drive the nation's economy.

Running my family business has provided me with an opportunity and sense of pride that would have been difficult for me to find anywhere else. Hopefully these tips help provide guidance to anyone looking to start (or join!) a family business.

Enjoy the ride!

- Matt Stock is president of U.S. Waterproofing, (<https://www.uswaterproofing.com/>) based in Rolling Meadows.