

Building a Healthy Team

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Turning any group of people into a team is a tough assignment. Forging two or more siblings into a team, especially if they didn't have team-building experiences growing up, is even tougher.

The emotional issues frequently get in the way — all the more reason to be aware of and understand these issues so that any negative impacts can be minimized or prevented altogether. Consider two brothers, Evan and Arthur. Evan is 39, eight years older than Arthur. Evan views himself as highly responsible and sees Arthur as someone who is somewhat irresponsible and just living off the fat of the family business. Arthur, after all, was the baby of the family.

For the first eight years of his life, Evan had been the center of attention and praise. Then Arthur came along and Evan had to fend for himself while little Arthur had everything taken care of for him. To this day, Evan treats his younger brother like a baby and Arthur reacts like one. To make matters worse, their parents, seeing that they aren't working well together in the business, intervene and make decisions their sons should be making or hold onto responsibilities their sons should be assuming.

Some Key Decisions Sibling Teams Must Make:

- How shall we make decisions?
- What will our code of conduct be?
- What will our leadership model be? If a single CEO, who will that person be?
- How shall we accommodate the simultaneous goals of the family and the business?

- Who shall our advisers be? Who should be on our board of directors?
- How will we make this business grow? What should our strategy be?
- How will we communicate with our parents? With nonfamily executives?
- What policies will we put in place?

Working out the issue of family relationships makes team building among siblings unique. And when parents haven't helped their children develop the skills for team success, the siblings, as adults, must develop those skills — including communications, conflict resolution, and shared decision making — on their own. What's more, for the sibling partnership to work, it must be autonomous from the parents. In addition, the siblings must find a healthy balance between relating as a unit to their parents and, when appropriate, relating to them individually.

Among the issues that Evan and Arthur will have to work out is their age spread. If they are to succeed as partners, they need to let go of the roles in which they have become stuck: as big brother and baby brother. When they can shed these long-held views of each other, the more ready they will be to learn to treat each other as equal, responsible adults, capable of running a business together. If their parents continue to intervene, they must find a way, as a unit, to take on more responsibility and not let their teamwork be compromised by Mom and Dad.

As a group of siblings who are committed to being a

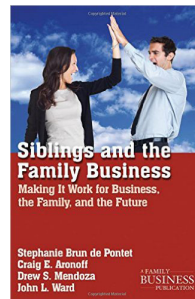
team but who may be beginning to work together in the family business for the first time, keep two things in mind: Almost every group stumbles initially. Developing a team usually involves taking two steps forward and one step back. Don't lose heart in the early going.

Usually, groups go through four predictable stages popularly referred to as forming, storming, norming, and performing.

The meaning of forming is obvious — a group of individuals comes together for a specific purpose. They decide to become a team. At the beginning, however, they face storming, meaning they experience conflict and disagreement as they try to get to know each other and the differences in their personalities and goals surface. Especially at this stage, there may be heated arguments, protection of turf, and occasionally tears.

Remember, this is a tough stage. But you'll find yourselves getting through it and reaching the norming stage, when you get used to each other, rules are agreed on, and you find ways to work together effectively. And finally, you reach the desired stage, performing, when, during the best of times, you are functioning together like parts of a smoothly running, well-oiled machine.

Expect conflict, and regard differences as an asset. Conflict is a given. Even though you come from the same family, each sibling is an individual, very different from any other. Those differences are also an asset because they bring a variety of talents, perspectives, and ideas to the table. With the commitment of everyone on the team and with the right structures, systems and procedures in place, conflict can be managed effectively and your differences can be capitalized on for the benefit of the company and of the family.



Excerpt from *Making Sibling Teams Work*, a book published by *The Family Business Consulting Group, Inc.* Available on Amazon and Palgrave MacMillan.

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