

## Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

By: Craig Aronoff, Ph.D. and Otis Baskin, Ph.D.  
The Family Business Consulting Group

What can members of the senior generation do to help young leaders emerge? Plenty.

The ideas we offer here are what you might call big-picture ideas. That is, they focus on creating a climate in which the notion of leadership excellence can flourish.

### Creating the Climate

One of the most important things you can do is create an environment in which young people come to embrace the concept that being a leader is a desirable goal. That may sound silly. You may be saying, Of course being a leader is a good thing!

However, how many times have you heard people in leadership roles disparage their positions? Probably fairly often. I don't know how they talked me into this, they lament. I never have time for anything else. In some family business cultures, leadership is avoided, not aspired to — a burden that an unlucky family member gets stuck with. This view may reduce conflict among otherwise competitive siblings. But on the whole, however, such an atmosphere is undesirable.

To assure the emergence of future leaders, you must have young people who aspire to leadership. That requires a culture in which leadership is appreciated and honored. You go a long way toward building that kind of environment when you acknowledge and praise the qualities that make different people in your family effective leaders.

You can help next-generation family members, from

the time they are young children, understand what leadership is all about. You can help them see that being a leader will enable them to use their gifts and talents to contribute to the world around them and will also bring many rewards perhaps wealth and prestige but, more important, the joy and satisfaction that comes with helping others or building an enterprise.

It is important to instill in younger people the knowledge that leadership begins with the recognition of the opportunity to provide leadership. Make sure they understand that they need to keep their eyes open and take responsibility. While you can be helpful, the work of preparation is up to them.

It's also essential that once they identify the opportunities, they ask not What do I want to accomplish for myself? but What do I want to accomplish for all? By consistently sharing that message and observing young people's behavior and giving feedback, you can keep them focused on the principle that effective family business leadership aims to accomplish what is best for the family and the business.

### Providing Development Opportunities

Once you have created the proper climate, you can turn your attention to the development of leadership itself. The more that young people get the chance to try out some leadership skills, the more excited about leading they will become. As you work with them, emphasize the fact that there are many leadership roles to which they can aspire. They may not be the top overseer and,

in fact, they may ultimately be happier in a different leadership position. Whatever they do as leaders, they can make an important contribution.

Here are some ways to involve younger family members in the practice of effective leadership:

Give them the opportunity to develop their skills by delegating small matters to lead. You can begin as soon as they are young teenagers, or even earlier, and continue providing them with more difficult leadership challenges as they grow into adulthood. Put them in leadership situations where, if they fail, they can learn without being embarrassed and turned off. Their assignments should also help them discover their growth capabilities and that they can come to informed decisions about how much and in what areas they want to lead.

Encourage young people to assume leadership positions at school and college and in community and religious organizations. Youth organizations, sports and other extra-curricular activities offer superb opportunities for practicing and developing leadership. High school and college students can edit the campus newspaper, direct plays, lead a choir, or be captain of the debate team.

Provide special leadership learning opportunities within the business and the family. Some business-owning families create junior boards or shadow boards where older teenagers are allowed to observe and to interact with shareholders and others who are making decisions about the business. Or they might be brought into the deliberations of the family council in ways that they can learn and contribute even before they're expected to take over responsibility.

Help them set goals for themselves and others. They'll need to establish educational goals, career goals, and leadership goals. And if they're aiming to be leaders, they will need to learn how to set goals for the organizations they lead and for individual followers. Use your experience to show how goal setting is done and encourage them to practice setting goals for others in their school or community organizations.

Look for leadership-education opportunities suited to their needs. One program tailored especially for members of business families is the Next Generation Leadership Institute (NGLI) at Loyola University Chicago's Family Business Center. It is an 18-month program specifically designed to prepare next-generation family members to lead their family business. Other programs are offered by the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina. See the resources section at the end of this book for contact information.

Another source of leadership training might be your industry or trade association. Many of their members are family businesses and these associations want to see those members succeed into future generations.

## Practice What You Preach

Without a doubt, the most important contribution you can make to the leadership development of your sons, daughters, nieces and nephews, and your grandchildren is to be an exemplary leader yourself. When young people see in you the qualities of effective leadership, that will do more to teach and inspire them than you can imagine. They will learn from you the need to adapt their leadership style to the situation. They will see by your example what true delegation is. They will begin to recognize opportunities for leadership and understand that it's up to them to seize those opportunities.

There is one more way you can contribute to their learning process a way we have not yet mentioned. If you are the CEO, don't try to solve all the company's problems before the kids take over. You can do the next generation a favor by leaving them with a challenge. Hopefully, they'll deal with it successfully and that will give them a boost in credibility and provide them with a tremendous head start in instituting their own leadership.

Reprinted with permission of the authors from *Effective Leadership in the Family Business* by Craig E. Aronoff, Ph.D. and Otis W. Baskin, Ph.D. ©2005, Family Enterprise Publishers, [www.thefbcg.com](http://www.thefbcg.com). All rights reserved.

---

To learn more about The Family Business Consulting Group and how we serve families like yours, call us at (773) 604-5005 or email us at [info@thefbcg.com](mailto:info@thefbcg.com). There is absolutely no obligation.

The copyright on this article is held by Family Business Consulting Group Publications®. All rights reserved. All forms of reproduction are prohibited. For reprint permission, contact [editor@thefbcg.com](mailto:editor@thefbcg.com).

THE FAMILY BUSINESS CONSULTING GROUP, INC. and FBCG are registered trademarks and the FBCG logo is a trademark of The Family Business Consulting Group, Inc.