



The Family Business Consulting Group, Inc.®

**Title:** Planting the First Seeds of Family Business Education  
**Author:** Stephanie Brun de Pontet  
**Column:**  
**June 2009**

Few business owners formally plan a program of education about the family business for their kids. Whether or not you have a structured program, you are teaching your kids every day, from a very young age, about the business through your deeds and words. Some business owners work endless hours and constantly complain during the little time they are at home about the struggles in their business. When many years later these individuals approach their children about joining them in the company—the very children who for years have overheard these complaints—they may be surprised to find that their children want nothing to do with “that toxic place.”

Joining the family business is not the right choice for every child of a business owner, but it is unfortunate if a next-generation family member dismisses this option because the only exposure to the business he or she ever received was negative. While there will always be only 24 hours in a day, and owning and managing a business can often be very time-consuming, there are little things you can do to help your kids develop a healthy view of the family business:

- 1) Be thoughtful in what you say about the business in front of your children when they are young. You should not give them an unrealistic picture that it is all flowers and victories, but ensure that in addition to acknowledging the struggles, you tell them regularly of your business triumphs. Allow your spouse and your children to share in your pride and enthusiasm.
- 2) Involve your children in the business. When faced with a particularly busy stretch, involve your children in some small way. This will make them feel like a part of your team. It can be as simple as having them sweep the floor in anticipation of a new store opening, doing some filing at the office on the weekend if you have to go in, or having them make a “Go Team” poster for the staff lounge to help you show appreciation to your employees for all their hard work during a crunch period. While the nature of the “work” should be age appropriate and something they are eager to do, the task itself is not all that important—as the real purpose is to help your children feel connected to you and the business, generating a happy memory for you all.
- 3) Recognize that the values you reinforce at home will have an enduring effect on your children, whether they join the family business or not. One competitive advantage of family businesses is that deeply held, shared values can give clarity of purpose to the business and help all stakeholders (family or otherwise) feel invested in moving the goals of the company forward. For example, treating others fairly, living up to your word, and saving resources so that you have some available for future investment opportunities are all life lessons we should strive to impart to our children. These lessons apply to all spheres of life. You can stress how the same values that apply at home also apply in your business. Making clear to your children how core values are applied at home and at work reinforces the importance of these values to your family. It also starts to give the next generation a deeper appreciation for everything the family business can represent.

While young children are not ready to absorb complex lessons on shareholder value and profits and losses, you don't want to inadvertently poison them to the entire topic by not acknowledging how the business affects their lives every day through its effect on you. When you offer your children positive interactions with the business and use the business as a platform to reinforce core family values, you are planting seeds that will open their hearts and minds to the business and make them better people, no matter what their future professional calling.

Articles purchased or downloaded from Family Business Consulting Group® are designed to provide general information and are not intended to provide specific legal, accounting, tax or other professional advice. Since your individual situation may present special circumstances or complexities not addressed in this article and laws and regulations may change, you should consult your professional advisors for assistance with respect to any matter discussed in this article. Family Business Consulting Group®, its editors and contributors shall have no responsibility for any actions or inactions made in reliance upon information contained in this article. Articles are based on experience on real family businesses. However, names and other identifying characteristics may be changed to protect privacy.

The copyright on this article is held by Family Business Consulting Group®. All rights reserved.

All forms of reproduction are prohibited. For reprint permission, contact [editor@familybusiness.com](mailto:editor@familybusiness.com)