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A Champion for Agriculture



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“The Top Ten Mistakes That Break Up a Family Business!”™

Article by Jolene Brown, Farmer and Professional Speaker, West Branch, Iowa

As a farmer and professional speaker, people in my audiences often confide in me. They tell me their stories about owning and working the farm with family members. Many are filled with anger, fear, disappointment and resentment. I listen carefully to their words and hearts. I share with them insight, realistic solutions, and tools to use. Then the next week I'm with a different audience. I hear the same stories with familiar plots.

Generation one is retired. (Well, he/she still comes to the farm and struggles with the transition from being the “independent boss” to being the “hired help” while still being the main capital investor.)

Generation two makes the management decisions and works very hard. (Communicates little, still trying to earn the unspoken respect of generation one. Worries about the estate plan of parents. Seeks to bring in the next generation for labor and please... not too many ideas.)

Generation three has many ideas, works very hard and brings those “in-laws” who ask questions. (He/she wants to be appreciated for energy and education and wants to know when he/she will be “old enough” to manage aspects of the farm. Exposure to technology and professions outside of agriculture have him/her asking questions, comparing and wanting answers.)

PROBLEM

In this generational diversity of needs and dreams, we have forgotten that sound business and transitional management must be based on more than genetics, tradition, assumptions and emotion.

THE RESULT?

We perpetuate what I call, “The Top Ten Mistakes That Break Up a Family Business!”™

1. Assuming all genetic relationships equal good working relationships
2. Believing the farm can financially support any and all family members who want to farm
3. Assuming others will / should / must change and not me
4. Presuming a conversation is a contract
5. Believing mind reading is an acceptable form of communication
6. Failing to build communication skills and farm/family meeting tools when the times are good so they'll be in place to use when the times get tough
7. Ignoring the in-laws, off farm family, and employees

*Jolene Brown encourages, teaches and celebrates those who feed, clothe and fuel the world.
She brings humor, hope and helpful ideas to the people of agriculture.™*

8. Forgetting to use common courtesy
9. Having no legal and discussed estate, management transfer plan, or buy/sell agreement
10. Failing to celebrate

At my seminars, we face realities, laugh and learn, open eyes, and sometimes even wipe tears. We discover solutions and tools that give us choices to move our farm families from stupidity to intelligence. If not, I always have available the duct tape and a 2 x 4.

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