

PRACTISE DESCRIPTION



Access to constructive relations in a family farm

Question

How to communicate as a successor within your own farm and family?

Problem

In family businesses, transferors and successors, sometimes with employees, work together. Differences in age, in interest and involvement, in experience and between men and women must work within the company. Even if everyone has responsibility for their own tasks, perhaps even for a fairly self-contained part of the company, there must still be a common orientation. If there is one company, there is a shared responsibility. How do you, as a successor, deal with these differences and achieve that shared responsibility?

In a family business, you are a colleague, partner, father, son, daughter, nephew, niece, father-in-law, uncle, aunt, boss, employee, company manager, head of department, instructor and much more. These relationships are intertwined and simultaneous. That is sometimes confusing: during the day, in the conversation with the accountant you are business partners and in the evening on the couch you are father and son. In the morning you discuss the weekly schedule and in the evening you visit a sick aunt together. But... how do you separate those roles and positions?



Solution

Dealing with differences is a skill that you can learn as a person, transferor and successor. Differences are always there and do not necessarily need to lead to disagreement. Entering into a conversation with a predetermined position and no intention to change that position, may lead to conflict. Opening yourself up to the perspectives of others can result in the best of multiple views being forged into a common agreement.



Practical recommendations

- 1. Be as clear as possible in your expectations and your experiences.** Speak for yourself, formulate your wishes and needs and at the same time give space to your family members to express theirs.
- 2. Be attentive to, have respect for and acknowledge all those involved.** If you feel any displeasure, ask about other people's experiences.
- 3. Often expressions of anger or displeasure are linked to something other than what is currently happening.** Are you irritated that someone else's stuff keeps getting in your way? Or is it really about your father, your son, your daughter or your partner not taking you seriously and not recognising your role? A question you can always ask yourself and others is "what is it all about?".



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4. Do not start a debate, but organise a dialogue.

Debaters try to win over others, partners in a dialogue try to learn from each other and delve into each other's views and listen to each other's experiences. Start a conversation with the intention to take note of each other's insights, opinions and interests. Let them get through to you and draw attention to your ideas and wishes.

5. Exchange experiences and inform each other about what you have heard and learned elsewhere.

In an agricultural business, there are family members who have a lot to do with people, rules and organisations from outside and there are family members who are mainly internally oriented. If you don't inform each other, you can get a company with dissimilar insights and speeds. Invest in exchanging information and insights and invest in the relationship. This means that you speak to each other sufficiently and you know what everyone is busy with.

6. Be aware that communication is about ideas and interests rather than opinions.

You can talk about ideas and interests. You can research them and you can discuss them. It is difficult to negotiate over opinions: once taken, they are hard to change and may create a gap.



Communication practice: I- and you-messages

In tense situations with many dilemmas and complex organisational problems, there is sometimes a tendency to try to convince or to change the other person. "What if you do that ...". "If you change your behaviour, yes you could do much more" etc. These are examples of "you- messages" that are not always well received. Start a conversation with "It is important to me that.... because, I would like to..." gives the other person an insight into your ideas. These are "I- messages" that can lead to insight into each other's views and motives.



Read more

For more information (in Dutch):
<https://edepot.wur.nl/240915>

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Date of publication: August 2020

NEWBIE Dynamic Learning Agenda

This practise description is developed to answer one of the questions from the NEWBIE dynamic learning agenda.

Theme: Access to constructive relations

Question: How to communicate as a successor within your own farm and family

Find more practise descriptions and the dynamic learning agenda on www.newbie-academy.eu/publications

