

FARM JOURNAL
Legacy Project

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Family Workshop

Communicating in the Family Business

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What is effective communication?

- ✓ Sending and receiving messages with as little distortion as possible.
- ✓ Understanding what your message is.
- ✓ Sending to the right audience.
- ✓ Using the correct channel.



Why is effective communication critical in the family business?

If communication is weak at work:

- Business relationships get difficult;
- Family relationships also suffer;
- Serious conflict may occur;
- Legacy dreams may be lost.



What is required in family business communication?

- ✓ The ability to win the willing cooperation of others.
- ✓ To send and receive messages effectively.
- ✓ To break old communication habits.



How can we win willing cooperation?

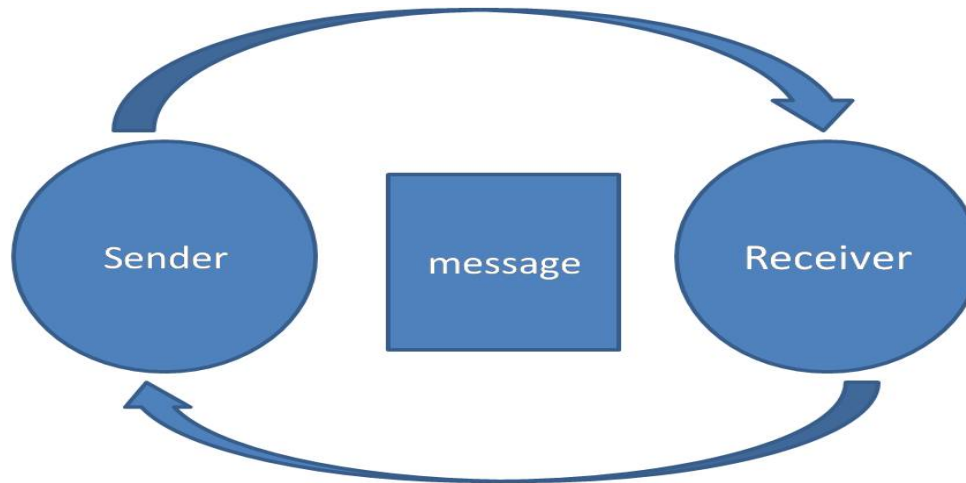
✓ Stop pre-judging the other person.



✓ Make it easy for the other person to cooperate.



How do we best send and receive messages?



Use “I” messages

Use Reflective listening

Use Feeling level communication

The four levels of communication

- ✓ Cliché level—unimportant chit-chat
- ✓ Fact level--basic info is shared
- ✓ Opinion level--talk about meaning of facts
- ✓ Feeling level—emotions are shared



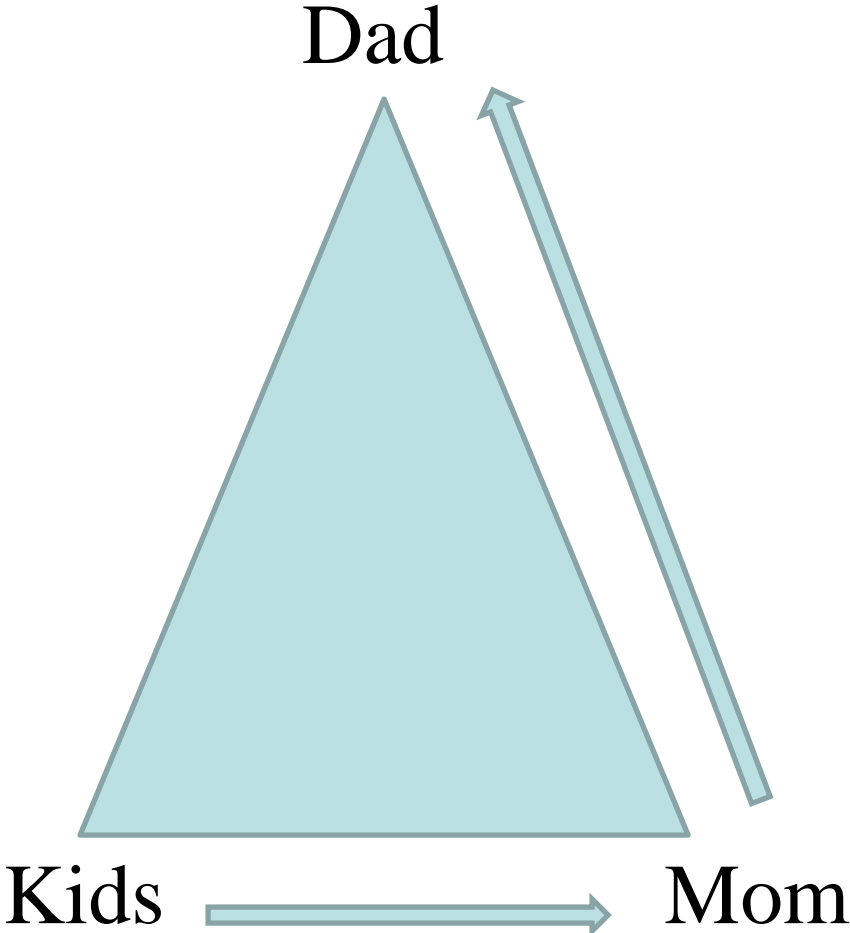
Adapted from article by Alan Zimmerman

Old Habits Are Hard To Break!

- ✓ We triangle our conversations
- ✓ We wait for the right time to discuss things and that time never comes.
- ✓ We assume we are understood because we are family.
- ✓ We shut down when conflict occurs.



Family Triangled Conversations



We talk if it is convenient...or never

- ✓ Business meetings are not planned...they just happen or don't happen at all.
- ✓ Challenging conversations are avoided hoping things will get better.
- ✓ Business is mixed with family gatherings.



"OK, who's ready for some bickering?"

Assumptions hurt communication



- ✓ We assume family members read our minds.
- ✓ We assume family members read our body language.
- ✓ We assume family members interpret things the way we do.

Avoiding differences is common

Most people try to avoid conflict.

- They shut down or walk away
- They hope it will disappear
- They pretend there is no conflict



What is required when confronting conflict?

- ✓ Openness and honesty
- ✓ Sensitivity for others' feelings
- ✓ Time to sit and talk
- ✓ Clarifying expectations
- ✓ Outlining consequences
- ✓ Ability to say, "I'm sorry...please forgive me."



Remember:

- ✓ When a family business is working well, it is good. When it isn't working well, it can be horrid.
- ✓ Practice effective communication every day.
- ✓ Keep your words soft and tender because you may have to eat them.

