



Media Release

Mothers & wives – the unrecognised heroes of family business SMEs

Friday November 21, 2014. The number of female entrepreneurs in small and medium businesses is growing rapidly and their vital contribution to Australia’s economic wellbeing, as producers and employers, is immense. It’s the new norm to see male and female business owners in equal numbers on stage at the many awards ceremonies across the country that recognise entrepreneurial and commercial excellence and innovation.

Although pleased to see this happening, Family Business Consultants Network (FBCN) Chair - Jon Kenfield - says there’s a whole other group of women sitting in the audience at these events who, while enthusiastically applauding the commercial successes of their husbands, partners and children, regrettably have their roles as mothers, wives and “family rocks” going largely unrecognised.

“In many family owned businesses, the commercial enterprise that takes up so much of dad’s time, energy and passion comes to be regarded (consciously or otherwise) as the unwelcome ‘*demon child*’ that lurks within the family unit. Wives and mothers are often required to be the lonely peacemakers who keep the family functioning, while their menfolk are off slaying dragons. In addition to being the “family rock”, in the early stages of many businesses they also have to work as the business receptionist, bookkeeper and general administrative support”.

“The pressure on these ladies is immense and it’s not uncommon for them to develop serious feelings of guilt and inadequacy about their home environments and parenting skills as the family grows up, eventually gets seriously out of balance and tensions start to flare dangerously. Most of this is attributable to the excessive physical and emotional demands made by the business over the growing up years,” added Kenfield.

“In many cases, when the business is finally established and parents have more time to focus on their families and their plans for a more gracious future, they try to make peace with their disenfranchised children. But by then it’s “too little, too late”.

Kenfield continued, “Balancing commercial with family dynamics is a challenging task for anyone and many men, especially the driven entrepreneurs who build and lead first generation businesses, don’t have the emotional skills, competencies or confidence they need to engage constructively in those emotional dimensions. They seem to fear that what looks like a can of worms will actually turn out to be a bucket of snakes, so they keep the lid tightly shut in the apparent hope that it won’t explode on them”.

“Their absence from this particular field of battle can stress a family to breaking point – where either the wife/mother feels she has to step in to save the family, or another family champion rises to the challenge – again because they fear the complete destruction of the family “if somebody doesn’t do something!”

“FBCN is often called in to resolve the threat to a family and/or a business that occurs when an entrepreneurial owner suffers an unexpected medical crisis, such as a heart attack. Because these guys build businesses that rely on their personal presence and direction they often fail to develop adequate internal support structures or systems. And because they (unconsciously) dominate and/or alienate their families in respect of the business, the family has limited ability to pick up the slack. Nevertheless, being family, they feel obliged to ride to the rescue – either for emotional or economic reasons, or both.

And then, at a time of great vulnerability and need, out comes the emotional baggage that’s been accumulating for years. Family tensions get in the way of business survival - at a time when cool heads and maturity are most needed”.

Kenfield notes that mature, long established family businesses are generally better structured and equipped to deal with crises, and with generational succession. The family has a better handle on the ‘other child’, and business leaders usually have more relaxed and comfortable relationships with their families. These family business dynasties develop cultures and processes, over multiple generations, to address the succession and wealth transfer issues that come with the natural cycle of life. Their parenting challenges, while different, are generally less frantic.

Kenfield explained that FBCN was established specifically to help family owned businesses better address succession and continuity related issues, and family tensions, through its collaborative, non-combative approach. “Traditional advisers, and their advisory models, are far too mono-technically focussed to successfully address the multi-faceted issues that arise in family businesses, particularly those in crisis. Our broad spread of skills across the network enables us to facilitate both types of conversation required: (1) emotional and (2) rational / commercial.

“FBCN gives mothers and wives an ally to help them save their families. Husbands and fathers gain an ally to help them to do their duty to their family and their business ... and save face in the process. Our objective is always to produce “a happier family and a stronger business”.”

“Through our process, the wives and mothers who’ve suffered long and silently over many years can finally look forward to a Christmas lunch with a united family – an immense relief and an invaluable gift”.

ENDS

Issued by the Family Business Consultants Network (FBCN) www.fbcn.com.au

Media Enquiries:

Mr. Joe Perri
Joe Perri & Associates Pty Ltd
Telephone/Fax: +61 3 9324 0362
Mobile: +61 412 112 545
Email: jperri@joeperri.com.au

Continues...