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RAISING A BUSINESS

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Communication is the key to running a **family business**. That's what 15 people who are involved on a professional level, not just a personal level with relatives, learned at the meeting "Cain & Abel: Why They Couldn't Grow Their **Business** or Find the "Success" in Succession," presented by two psychologists, recently.

Dr. Alan H. Lovins, a licensed psychologist with 25 years experience in working with **families** and **business**, and Dr. Michael L. Stem, a licensed clinical psychologist with 12 years experience in working with **family** firms, presented the meeting at the People's Bank Conference Center on April 25.

As part of the University of Connecticut **Family Business** Program Workshop--Lovins and Stem lectured, answered questions and shared ideas with people looking for guidance on how to work with their siblings, parents and children.

Stern discussed the fact that people tend to treat **family** and others they become comfortable around worse than strangers -- a major problem for **family** businesses that can hurt production. Lovins added that when it comes to **business**, siblings have expectations based on **family** conflicts that went on 25 years ago, for example. Stern said a mother's role to support children, can develop from **family** relations into **business** interaction.

To deal with conflict and run a **family business** smoothly, Lovins suggested the need to avoid blaming, making it a point to speak respectfully and being able to overlook issues and move on.

"Listen to understand, don't listen to respond," Lovins said. "Don't lose it. It's important to say what you need to say, but keep your footing."

Stern suggested: "Praise publicly, criticize privately is a good rule for **family business**."

Stern pointed out that **family** members or longtime co-workers are more likely to interrupt each other than employees who do not know each other well.

"I got a squirt gun. If anybody interrupted anyone else--they got squirted," said a woman who attended the

meeting, but would not release her name, generating laughter throughout the participants.

"Yeah, there's going to be conflict. There has to be conflict," Lovins added. "It's probably even good--it's necessary and it provides energy."

"It's the power of diversity that makes the **family**, the **business**, strong," said Robin Trauck, co-president of Tauck World Discovery, a Westport **business**, with her brother, Peter Tauck. Robin's father and brother-in-law also have a hand in the third-generation **family business**. She attended the meeting, in part, because she will be presenting "Siblings in Succession" at the Trumbull Marriott (Thursday, May 17, 5 to 8 p.m.).

Decision making in a **family business** is not always easy, Lovins argued.

"It takes a lot of courage for a father to say 'This is who I would like to run the **business**,'" he explained. "If you don't make these decisions rationally and according to merit, than the **business** will die."

Stern suggested that **family business** planning -- for how people taking over or leaving a **business**, for example, is handled -- be dealt with early, on to avoid unnecessary conflict down the next.

"A good rule of thumb would be to just brainstorm without any decision taking place," said Ron Netter, an attendee.

Handouts given to those in attendance offered guidelines for "smooth **family** functioning." Among the suggestions: Hold **family** meetings, never undermine a **family** member in front of others, have a **family** code of conduct, address conflict in constructive ways, discuss issues at appropriate times, treat **family** members like you would a valued employee or important customer.

Lovins claimed that children in **family** businesses often become linked to the **business** in an unhealthy way. He said they are known to be overpaid and unable to leave the **business** and move on to grow and develop.

"And that's when it really gets miserable--when the children get depressed and trapped," Lovins said, adding that these businesses must be planned so that children are given a sense of future growth and management.

Outside guidance was discussed as option to help **business**.

"**Family** is the nexus of society and **business** -- it organizes each of them," said Dirk Dreux, of Dreux Consulting out of Greenwich, who assists **families**.

"They adopt you -- you become part of what they do," Dreux said.

The benefit of a **family business**, Dirk argues, is that co-workers tend to share values -- similarly to political, religious and non-profit organizations.

"A lot of these **business** tend to be in niches because they have inordinate rewards," he added, saying that big corporations lack shared mission small businesses possess.

Strategies for success

- Hold **family** meetings.
- Never undermine a **family** member in front of others.
- Have a **family** code of conduct.
- Address conflict in constructive ways.

- Discuss issues at appropriate times.
- Treat **family** members like you would a valued employee or important customer.

PHOTO (COLOR): "Praise publicly, criticize privately is a good rule for **family business**," says Dr. Michael L. Stern, a licensed clinical psychologist, who spoke at a Bridgeport seminar on "Cain & Abel: Why They Couldn't Grow Their **Business** or Find the `Success' in Succession."

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By Andy Hutchison

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