

Changing Lanes

Transition planning for entrepreneurs and family businesses

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with compliments from



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Guiding Families and Business. Now to Next.

Managing the Seven Dwarfs



When Snow White gathers the family together for a meeting she can be sure that Doc will be there, intimidating all the others. While he is great at envisioning things from a long-range perspective, Doc has little patience when the other dwarfs don't see the same picture. Seated next to Doc, Grumpy tries to take charge and make the others feel uncomfortable about their own views on things, while Sneezzy's private agenda is to sabotage the leadership in the guise of being honest or helpful.

On the other side of the table, Bashful is keeping a low profile, preferring to hear everyone else's ideas. Dopey pretends to be somewhat interested but as he learns best in a "hands-on" environment he finds meetings a waste of time. Sleepy reacts with apparent boredom and manages to bring down the energy of the whole group.

But Happy is fully engaged, right? Sorry. Overly-cooperative Happy is focused only on coming up with what he imagines is the right answer!

In her characterization of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Dr. Sharon Livingstone aptly interprets the different personalities that typically grace the boardroom and dining-room tables and helps us understand why we business owners are reluctant to hold any meetings that bring "family members" together. We fear having to manage negative character traits or escalating conflict. We are afraid it will become a free-for-all. Yet regular meetings are critical to maximizing the strength of the business family and grooming the next generation for leadership.

In this edition of Changing Lanes, we review techniques to help you better manage your family and business meetings to ensure they are more productive and inspiring. We explore the structure of effective meetings that create opportunities rather than problems. 

Inside....

Equipping the Communication Vehicle	2
Running Effective Meetings	2
Promote Participation and Problem-Solving	3
The Role of the Chair	4
Setting the Agenda	4

Changing Lanes

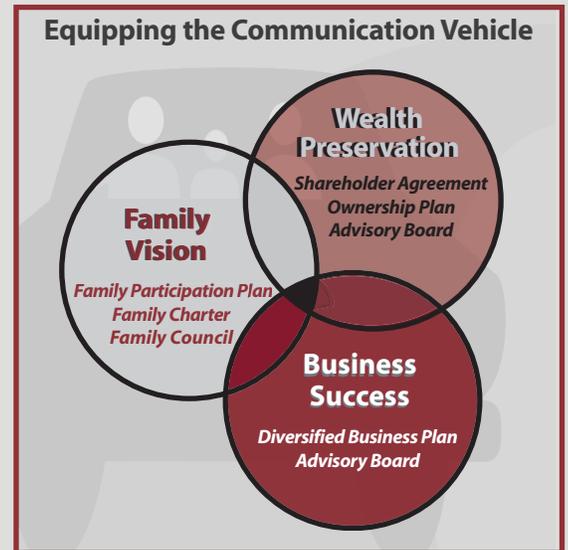
Transition planning for entrepreneurs and family businesses

Equipping the Communication Vehicle

An examination of the key methodologies for creating wheel alignment in your communication vehicle wouldn't be complete without a review of one very critical component ~ how to ensure that the face-to-face communication is effective and productive.

In the last edition of *Changing Lanes*, we highlighted the power of collaboration in navigating the family business highway. We saw that mastering this problem-solving technique enables business families to create a "we focus" and realize their common interest. We looked at the steps required for successful collaboration and examined some techniques for building a collaborative team.

Of course, getting to that collaborative outcome requires more than a process. On a practical level, your team needs (1) the opportunity to be engaged and (2) a safe forum to share their ideas and practice collaboration. This edition of *Changing Lanes* provides tips and techniques to balance both. 



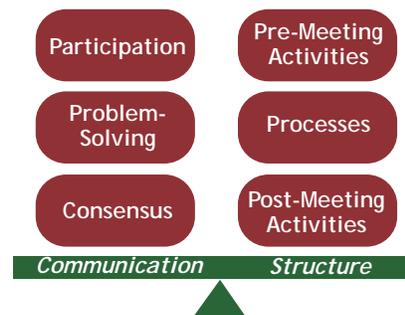
Running Effective Meetings

Good meetings are products of good leadership and good leaders know how to maintain group cohesion.

In running effective meetings, the role of the leader is to balance the level of open **communication** with a significant amount of **structure**.

On the **Communication** side, a conscious effort is required to continually promote individual participation along with group problem-solving and getting consensus on decisions.

Structure is the key to managing and maintaining this open communication and ensuring all members are treated with dignity and respect. Structure is much more than meeting rules. It includes planning ahead to provide relevant information before the meeting and following up on the action items coming out of the meeting. Consider the following tips for incorporating each component.



Participation

Consider using some of the more inclusive methods of communication to get Sleepy, Dopey and Bashful to actively participate and at the same time prevent Grumpy, Sneezzy or Doc from forcing their viewpoints on others. The techniques suggested on page 3 are designed to give everyone an equal voice and ensure that no individual monopolizes the discussions.

Problem-Solving

Getting to a collaborative outcome requires both a common interest or goal, and a variety of problem-solving skills and techniques.

To set the stage for a determined effort to resolve issues and manage differences, begin by creating an understanding that conflict is a by-product of change, and that change is constant and a necessary stepping-stone to achieving greater success. Having the confidence to provide a forum for open communication delivers a clear message that a two-way dialog and feedback are valuable.

Continued on page 3

Changing Lanes

Transition planning for entrepreneurs and family businesses

Running Effective Meetings *continued*

Helping all group members understand their own and each other's natural conflict handling styles (as outlined in the previous issue of Changing Lanes) is an important step. Similarly, assessing and sharing each individual's personality type, natural tendencies and work style increases awareness and builds cohesion.

We also recommend engaging an outside facilitator during the start-up phase. A facilitator has a neutral position so he or she can look beyond each person's presenting position to identify the underlying needs.

Consensus

Consensus is the desired outcome of a participatory group decision. As defined by wikipedia, the objective is to **reach the best possible decision for the group and all of its members, rather than competing for personal preferences.**

So consensus doesn't mean that everyone's wishes are fully met but rather finds an outcome that is acceptable enough that all members will support it and no one will outrightly oppose it. In getting to consensus, it is important to frequently find out where people stand on the issue and have a defined process to deal with any veto.

Pre-Meeting Activities

Planning is essential to the success of every meeting. Implementing the following steps serves to professionalize the process, keeps everyone informed and engaged, and leads to greater productivity.

- Call for agenda items to be submitted a minimum of 3 (but preferably more) days before the meeting date. Contributors must clarify the issue, outline the objectives and supply relevant background material.
- Develop the agenda in cooperation with key contributors.
- Assign supporting roles such as co-facilitator, time-keeper, note-taker, door-keeper etc.
- Arrange for a suitable location, equipment and refreshments for the meeting and plan the seating arrangements.
- At least 2-3 days prior to the meeting, distribute the agenda together with any background material provided by contributors.
- Prepare visual aids and handout materials.

Processes

Developing guidelines around how meetings will be structured and conducted is an important first step. We recommend

Continued on page 4

Promote Participation and Problem-Solving

- 1 *Begin the meeting by asking each person to articulate what would make it a good meeting. Record their comments, then review the notes at the end of the meeting to check if their expectations were met.*



- 2 *Encourage participation in brainstorming sessions by having each person write their idea or comment on a sticky note. Gather the notes and group those with a common theme. The size of the note ensures that each person is concise with their comments and has an equal amount of air time.*



- 3 *To prevent ownership of an idea from taking precedence over the idea itself, consider utilizing Edward de Bono's Six Hat Thinking. This process gathers a group's perspectives by encouraging people to think with six different mindsets instead of just following their natural tendencies. As a result, all have greater clarity around the merits of an idea instead of merely adopting a "for" or "against" position.*



- 4 *Giving each participant a set of our road signs helps maintain order during discussions. The STOP sign is held up as a warning that the topic is getting off track or it's time to hear from someone else. The CAUTION sign means someone wants to clarify a point. Holding up the GO sign signifies that person has a question or wishes to make a comment.*



- 5 *As a topic discussion progresses, take time out to check if people have enough information, or to get their current perspective, before moving to the decision point. You can use the "thumbs up" technique to see whether or not they fundamentally agree with the discussion, or to conduct a final vote. Those who are neutral or disagree should explain why.*



I agree



I am neutral



I disagree

Changing Lanes

Transition planning for entrepreneurs and family businesses

Running Effective Meetings *continued*

setting out the roles, responsibilities, and accountability of individual members and assigning a facilitator or chairperson who has the ability to engage participants, ensure everyone feels heard, and keep the meeting on track. Meeting rules to ensure that all in attendance show respect for each other's time, contribution, and viewpoints are key, as is clarity around acceptable ways to proffer those views and participate in the discussion.

Post-Meeting Activities

All too often, people leave a meeting, go back to their routine and promptly forget the tasks assigned to them until the date of the next meeting rolls around.

For the meeting to be truly effective, there needs to be timely follow up on the action items. Ensure meeting notes are sent out within 3-4 days and document:

- The meeting highlights and successes.
- Each action item and the person responsible.
- The due date for any action times or committee reports to ensure they are received in time for the next pre-meeting planning.
- A request for feedback on the meeting to determine if processes need to be improved.

Removing the focus from any one of these essential components will quickly cause the system to become unbalanced. 



The Role of the Chair

A facilitative chairperson is key to running an effective and productive meeting. It is the chair's responsibility to:

- Ensure that pre and post meeting activities are conducted and on schedule. These typically include setting and sending out the agenda, assigning support roles, sending out minutes and ensuring that action items are completed. *See below on tips for setting up the agenda.*
- Start and end the meetings on time.
- Ensure the meeting rules are upheld. Meeting rules are necessary to define responsibilities and acceptable behaviour. They also remind the group of previously-agreed processes and clarify authority and accountability.
- Follow the agenda and keep the group participative, collaborative and focused.
- Remain neutral and impartial.
- Be a role model by listening, showing interest and giving praise.
- Summarize points, decisions and/or action items at the end of each discussion.
- Ensure that everyone is clear on the proposal or motion before moving to a vote.
- Announce the date, time, and venue for the next meeting. 

Setting the Agenda

- Specify the date, location, start and end times.
- Plan a warm-up or ice-breaker activity.
- Develop the agenda items and include an overview and key objectives for each topic.
- Estimate the time allotment for each agenda item and indicate who will present it.
- Include time to gather meeting expectations at the beginning of the meeting and to check back at the end to see if those expectations were met.
- Don't schedule difficult items too early or too late in the agenda.
- Alternate short and long agenda items.
- Schedule breaks at minimum every 90 minutes. 

For more ideas or assistance in setting up or running your family council, shareholder or management advisory board meetings, give us a call directly. We will be happy to help.



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