

Hello, this is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thank you for watching our blog. We hope that you will provide us with your comments below and that you'll follow us on social media. There's the YouTube and Twitter icons and all that stuff. It helps with our search engine optimization, so we appreciate that.

This week I want to talk about responsibility in your family business, and there's a story behind this. I think it's amusing but we'll see. I'm on vacation with the wife and we stopped at a grocery store to pick up a few items. I'm just waiting for her in the car, and I see a couple walk out of the grocery store, and they're chatting amiably. They look like they're on vacation too. They're all relaxed and everything. They got out the door like 10 steps and then one of the cashiers came running out with a grocery bag that they had left on the counter. They came out with one bag, but they had left the other bag on the counter. They immediately ... this couple they thanked the cashier first, and then they immediately went from being very amiable and cordial and loving with each other to jawing and snipping at each other. "You dummy, you left it," or, "No, you left it. You're the dummy," that kind of stuff.

I have three conclusions based on what I saw about these people coming out of the grocery store. The first thing is when you own your own small business, it's hard to turn yourself off. Now here I am on vacation with my beautiful wife, and I'm not supposed to be thinking about you guys and family businesses and what to do on the blog, but there I am. She gets back in the car. I'm on my phone typing notes to myself so that I could remember this incident for the purpose of getting it out Wednesday morning.

The second thing is that in families and in family businesses, familiarity does bring contempt. What I mean by that is not that we don't love each other and we don't care about each other, but I think if two acquaintances had gone into that grocery store ... if you and I had gone into that grocery store and we'd walked out and somebody ran out with a bag, you and I being acquaintances and not family, we'd laugh and go, "Oh golly. What a dummy I am. I can't believe I just did that," and it would go away. In a family, it's like our temperatures are always near that 220 degree boiling point. It's not because we're angry with each other all the time, it's just because we're so familiar with each other. We've been around, we have accumulative history with each other that goes back so far. We're never at temperature zero with each other, like strangers or acquaintances might be. We're always at temperature 180 or 190 or 200 and it just doesn't take us that much extra to get over that boiling point and go from being amiable and friendly to snipping at each other.

That's my second conclusion, but my main point is this. What I thought about when that cashier ran out and they started snipping at each other, was that neither one was responsible for picking up the groceries and making sure they had all their purchases. It dawned on me, this happens a lot in family businesses, because I hear people say that it's everybody's responsibility to do marketing and business development, or "It's everybody's responsibility to be looking after safety," or, "It's everybody's responsibility to make sure we're managing our finances." That is so wrong.

I know the spirit. I know the philosophy, but look. If somebody specific in your organization is not responsible for these important things, safety, business development, finances, whatever it happens to be. If someone

specifically is not specifically accountable and responsible for those activities in your business, nobody is. With that couple, nobody was really responsible for bringing out the groceries. I was responsible but my wife was responsible too. Nobody's responsible.

My point is this. People crave clear roles, responsibilities and accountability, and if you as the leaders of your family business are not providing that structure and clarity in your organization, and you're just expecting everybody to do what it takes and get it done, you're missing the boat. Somebody has to be responsible, and if everybody's responsible, no one is.

This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thank you.