

Hello. This Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thanks for tuning in as always. And, as always, we would like to have your comments and reactions to our blogs. So just look below and click the box and you're off and running.

So, we were having a strategic planning meeting in the fourth quarter of 2017, and one of our gifted amazing consultants, Doug McCright, he said, really the biggest impediment to his clients' success seems to be they don't know what they don't know. And I thought that was so profound. I said, "That is a blog right there." I heard this story one time. I can't remember if I read it or heard it, I don't remember where it came from. It's probably really famous and I'm just screwing this up. So, this young ingénue is talking to a really wise and successful business person and she says, "How did you get to be so successful?" And he says, "Good decisions." And she said, "Well, how did you learn to make such good decisions?" And he went, "Bad decisions." And so that's the luxury of having some gray hair, you've survived your bad decisions. But let's face it, I mean we all make some pretty bad decisions in life and in business. But those of us that survive them learn and move on.

But Doug's comment was, the biggest impediment to family businesses' success is they don't know what they don't know. And he pointed this out really quickly. It's not a failure of intelligence, not at all. It's just that we all have blind spots. I mean, there are things we simply don't know or maybe even cannot know. If we knew what we didn't know, we would read books, or we would hire people that knew these things. But since they are blind spots, we really can't fill in those gaps. They just don't get there.

There are some things that are more than blind spots. There are some things that people refuse to see. I remember working with a guy once and when he heard something that he didn't want to believe, irrespective of whether it was entirely factual or not, he would just say, "I don't accept that." And then you would go, "Well, where do I go from here?" It was really frustrating. But certain things he just refused to see and shut down. And maybe we all do that to one degree or another mentally. He just did it overtly.

The things that we're blind about most often, I think, in family businesses are things like ourselves, right? We are objective with respect to other people, we judge them on their actions. We judge ourselves mostly based on our intentions, so that's a little easier standard. We're really not objective about ourselves. So maybe you're not the leader that you think you are in your family business. We recently did 360-degree evaluations and I got some feedback that, frankly surprised me. I kind of thought I was doing better in this area or that, and I got some blunt feedback from my team. So, getting some feedback along those lines is a terrific thing.

Another thing that people have trouble with is evaluating their sons or daughters, or nieces or nephews in the family business. You know, you really have to be objective. Do these people really have what it takes to lead the business now and in the future? And there again, getting some objective third party feedback on that can help. Same thing with employees. We all have long-term employees that, you know, do a good job some days, maybe not so much other days. I found in talking to family business leaders around that we really have a hard time evaluating our long-term employees because we think of them very much like family. And our hearts are too big

sometimes, and we really resist the idea that they're not cutting the mustard anymore and maybe they do need to move on.

We have blind spots about technology. Those of us that are aging, especially struggle sometimes with the new technology. Systems and processes we struggle with. We're kind of married to our old systems. But as our companies get bigger and more complex, we need new and different and better systems to manage the people, and technology, and processes, and all those things. But we all have blind spots.

So, according to Doug, because Doug is my wise guy around here, how do you learn what you don't know? Well, you've got to get outside mostly. If you stay within your four walls, you're going to be imprisoned almost by that which you don't know. First of all, you've got to carve out time for learning. Taking a class, going to a university, getting some new training, being challenged, challenging your thought processes. Read. I know everybody says, "I don't have time to read." Well, today with audio books ... I was going to say books on tape, that shows you how old I am. But with all of the audio books that you can subscribe to, the podcasts that are out there, you don't have to read, to read anymore. You can just listen. You can just be driving down the highway with your earbuds in and pick up a wealth of new information and new ideas.

Talk to other business people, whether they're in your industry or not. Network. I'm terrible at networking. You know, when I'm away from work I don't like to talk about work. But it's a great thing to learn perspectives from other people. And, of course, that word perspective in itself is important. Zig Ziglar used to talk about hardening of the attitudes. And as we age, sometimes we do get hardening of the attitudes. Listening, reading, networking with other people challenges those perspectives and gives us new vistas about which to think and look.

And then, finally, of course you knew I was going to say this, the best thing to me for knowing what we don't know is peer groups. So, if you have a chance to get into a peer group in your industry, your locality, whatever, by all means. I can't recommend them enough. I've told you many times about how important our peer group has been to us. And, if you have a chance to get into a peer group, take it. It'll be one of the best business decisions you have ever made.

This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. I would like to hear your thoughts about knowing what you don't know and how to get around some those blind spots. Maybe you could share your techniques with us and the rest of the blog audience. Thanks so much. This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute.