

Hi, this is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thanks for tuning in. Please subscribe to our social media channels - that helps with our search engine optimization, and as always we would be interested to have your comments, what you think about our blogs, ideas for future blogs, et cetera.

So, my blog this week is a question, why is bad behavior tolerated in family businesses? And I'll tell you how this got started. So, last month I'm watching the All-Star Game Home Run Derby, and this guy's at bat, and he's doing pretty well, he's knocking the ball out on a regular basis. All of a sudden, he had a few bad swings, and he didn't really drive the ball. And the announcer said, he actually started jawing at his batting practice pitcher and gesturing where he wanted the ball delivered, and the announcer said, "Hey, it's funny. It's okay to yell at your brother," the brother was actually the pitcher, "It's okay to yell at your brother on national television, but you would never yell at your pitching coach."

And I heard that remark and immediately I thought blog. Why is it okay for an announcer to say that? Why is it okay to have this assumption that, in front of millions of viewers, it's quite all right to yell at your brother, when you wouldn't yell at a comparative stranger? Shouldn't it be the other way around? You've got nothing to risk with a comparative stranger, if that person hates you, who cares? You're probably never going to see him again. But with your brother, holy moly, why would you do that?

So, why do we assume it's true that it's okay to yell in the context of a family business? Because we know it happens, public dress downs, public disputes, fist fights, I mean we've had all kinds of stories in our family companies over the years about this lack of discipline, when it comes to anger and strong emotion. I've personally been guilty of it, when we were in the early days of The Family Business Institute. We were a family business. I personally have been guilty of this.

I remember Zig Ziglar years ago talked about this phenomenon in a different way. He said that during the work week, we dress up nicely, and we comb our hair, and we groom ourselves, and we go to work to be around a bunch of people that are our acquaintances, maybe not necessarily our friends and certainly not our family. And on the weekends, we don't shave, and we wear sweat pants, and we look all sloppy, and we don't care. In other words, the appearance that we give to relative strangers is better than the appearance that we present around the people that we love and care for the most, and he just thought that was odd, and this is kind of the same phenomenon.

Does familiarity have to breed contempt? I don't think it does. I think that most family businesses should have some ground rules, written ground rules for how they're going to talk to each other. It doesn't have to be complicated. It could be something just four or five bullet points, but there should be some ground rules, and one of those ground rules should be that we don't air our disputes in public. We go behind closed doors. It might get heated, that's okay, but we don't yell at each other in public, and we don't fight, and we don't undercut the other people in our family business.

Here's an acid test question that we use sometimes when we've got people in family businesses that are behaving poorly. We ask people, "Would you hire your son or daughter or niece or nephew or brother or sister, knowing what you know now, would you hire them again to work in your family company" and you wouldn't believe it, so many of the times, the answer comes back "No, I wouldn't hire that person again." And a corollary is, would you speak to that person that way in the context of your business, if they weren't your brother or sister or niece or nephew? And if the answer comes because no in that corollary question, then why tolerate that behavior?

So, just be disciplined, police yourself, develop ground rules for how you're going to talk to each other, and don't tolerate bad behavior in your family business. It's as simple as that.

Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute, I'd love to have your comments. Thank you.