

# Upholding Family Values in Business

*Adapted from an AF business seminar presentation given by Wayne Wengerd*

Which comes first, my business or my family?

Perhaps this is the wrong question to ask. Too often we say the family comes first but then give priority to the business. If you must choose between the two, only one will get your focused attention. What happens if, instead, we ask, “How can we balance the needs of *both* our family and our business?” In Anabaptist farming history, this balance happened more naturally. Family and faith, work and worship were all intertwined. Today, with fewer families farming, the challenge is more prevalent. How can we successfully combine and balance family and business?

## **Intersection of Family and Business**

In our world today, we face a great need for wholesome work. Over half of the Amish population is under 20 years old; our young families need work to support themselves. Not only do they need work, they also need work environments that help build the kingdom of God. This need can be fulfilled with thriving businesses within the plain community.

Neither strong families nor successful businesses happen by accident. It takes a keenly focused vision accompanied by a strong action plan. Noah’s story in Genesis repeatedly mentions not only Noah, but also his wife, his sons, and his sons’ wives. They were obviously a strong family unit. Noah’s family was blessed and able to accomplish great work for the kingdom. Building the ark required more

than wishful thinking or just hoping. It took an intentional long-term focus, a plan, and diligent effort.

Family and business don’t blend automatically. It takes practice to get everyone to sing in harmony. Some children might seem to be singing offkey and seemingly can’t blend well into the family business. Make sure they understand that this is okay and that they are not required to join the family business. They may fit better somewhere else. Let them go if they find fulfillment elsewhere, or you could even help them start their own business.

Employing family members creates some unique challenges. The employed child can never be allowed to be a spoiled brat on the job and not required to do his share; other employees will be frustrated and feel cheated. If the family is dysfunctional, it will invariably show up and impact the business negatively. Even good strong families will have struggles and challenges. Responding promptly to resolve family issues and challenges minimizes their impact on the family business.

## **Family Needs**

What family needs must be met? What are some basic requirements for building strong families?

- Time away from the business – schedule time to do things as a family outside the business. Keeping it simple makes it easier to accomplish. Take the family fishing at a local pond, plan a picnic lunch by the

creek, or spend a half day at a local auction or swap meet. These are ideas to get started; there are many others. Involve the family and use your imagination.

- Meals together – strong families eat together as much as possible. Schedule at least one meal daily with everyone present. This can be your “family time” with all family members sharing and contributing.
- Spiritual leadership – schedule time for family devotions. Read God’s Word together. Sing together. Pray with and for each other. Encourage all family members to participate.
- Rest and recreation – these are essential, but in a proper order of priority. They should come after work and sacrificial serving. The goal is to rest, to unwind, and to be personally edified. Shun mere entertainment and amusement.

## **Upholding Family Values in Business**

It has been said that “the first generation starts a business; the second generation runs the business; the third generation ruins the business.” Sadly, this happens far too often, but it doesn’t have to.

There are reasons that some families work together successfully for generations while others struggle in vain. In my observation, here are a few things that are key to the long-term success of your family and business:

- Have a clear vision with a long-term plan.
- Be very diligent about communication.
- Teach and train your children with purpose.
- Every child is born with a need to belong and a need to be part of something greater than himself. Be sure that need is met in your children.

In our family business, we occasionally get tourists who want to tour our shop and visit with us. Comments and questions from them have helped me appreciate our Anabaptist heritage. They have also provoked me to think seriously about what we truly value. I tell them our values are faith, family, and community. Our faith is a kingdom focus that guides everything we do. Our family is a God-designed structure where children are brought into the world and provided a safe environment to grow up in. Our community is primarily the church and working together in brotherhood.

What Anabaptist traits do we identify with? We should determine and define values for the family and the business.

Following are some key Anabaptist tenets and teachings utilized by strong families to work together in harmony.

### **Vision**

Solomon in his great wisdom stated, “*Where there is no vision, the people perish...*”<sup>1</sup> Losing vision is a far greater loss than the business closing or the barn burning. Some of us are so busy getting the work done we forget the important matters. Let’s ponder our motives, asking, “Why am I in business?”

Every business and every family needs a vision and mission statement. A vision statement defines where we want to go or what we want to accomplish. For example, the greatest vision statement ever is found in John 17:12, that “*none of them is lost.*” This was God’s vision. The mission statement defines how we will accomplish the vision. For example, the greatest mission statement ever is found in Luke 4:18: “*to preach the gospel to the poor...to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.*” Put your vision and mission statements in writing and periodically refer to them. It will help you stay on track.

### **Leadership**

Successful businesses need strong leadership. Leaders lead—they go first; they set the bar for everyone in the organization. They take the blame when things go wrong. Remember, if things go wrong in business, we owners or managers failed somewhere. It is our responsibility to resolve problems. Strong leaders are quick to share the credit when things go well. They lead with humility and a servant attitude. Jesus set the example and modeled this for us.

### **Discipleship**

We are followers of Christ and obedient to His teachings. We live and demonstrate Sermon on the Mount principles in our daily interaction with others.

### **Integrity**

In Switzerland, where the Amish originated, Anabaptists were known for their firm dedication to abide by the New Testament standard of truth. They

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 29:18

were known as “men of truth.” Their commitment to faith and integrity was more precious to them than family, home, or life itself. Living our values and teaching them by example happens simultaneously. We have been taught to live by the Golden Rule and insist on honesty and integrity in everything we do. Your children are watching every move you make. Integrity is not something we can practice ninety percent of the time. Either you have integrity, or you do not.

### **Accountability and Transparency**

Develop written business policies and agreements. Do this while you still like each other; that way, you are more likely to continue liking each other. Be clear on expectations, terms, and conditions. This prevents misunderstandings and confusion. Then, when questions arise, you can go back and see what the agreement was. In every business, even in strong families, there will be misunderstandings and things that go wrong. Conflict is a given, but combat is optional. Don't fight. It wastes energy and impedes progress. And it is both selfish and sinful.

### **Witness**

There is no greater opportunity to share the hope within us than in the marketplace, and especially within our businesses. Every day in business provides opportunity to share the Truth. Christians are willing to share the Gospel but also ready to provide a listening ear. Witnessing in a quiet way can be very effective, but there are times that we need to speak up. There is a time to listen and a time to speak.

### **Community**

We rely on mutual aid instead of insurance. We emphasize generosity, empathy, and sharing. For example, one of our employees had a barn fire this summer and within two weeks after the fire, his barn was replaced with a new one and filled with new equipment and harnesses. His own Amish brotherhood was prompted to meet this need. Other Anabaptist and non-Anabaptist churches in the area came alongside as well. This was a strong community in action, a trait that was passed down from our forefathers.

### **Hospitality**

One of the better things we can do for our children is to practice hospitality with them to a wide variety of people. This broadens their horizons and makes them more aware and understanding of other cultures. It provides many teachable moments. Take your guests with you to church or family gatherings. The experience may do more for you and your family than it will ever do for them.

### **Frugality**

When our children were all still at home, my industrious wife raised a large garden in the summertime. Some years it produced more than we needed, so rather than throw food away, she would send the children to the shop with bags of extra produce which they shared with customers, truck drivers, or mail carriers. The principles of frugality and not wasting will stay with children all of their lives.

### **Spouse Support**

Many spouses do not work in or even know much about the family business, but I can assure you that my wife is vital to our business. She may not know much about the business, but she knows a lot about me. Some days everything seems to go wrong. It feels like the entire world is working against me, and I tend to get discouraged. We business owners need at least one person that cheers and claps for us on days like this. That one person is my wife. I need her and I need her support in my business.

### **Code of Conduct**

One of the most essential tools you can give your children is a family code of conduct. Compile a list of absolutes, deciding what your family will or will not do, where you will or will not go, what you will tolerate in the home and what you won't. Make it a list of wills and won'ts rather than one of do's and don'ts. Include your growing family when creating your list, and write it down. A written family code of conduct empowers children to resist peer pressure and temptations when they are on their own.

## **Compensation**

Everyone wants to be paid for their work and that includes your children. How do you pay your children as they grow up and become more involved in the business? Graciously compensate them for their performance. Be firm and fair. Make sure they understand there are no shortcuts to the top, that there is no “free lunch.” We don’t fall to the top of the mountain; we climb there. Guard against your children’s tendency toward entitlement. Teach them that *more* is expected of them because they are the boss’s children. They might not agree at the time, but teach them anyway, not only because it’s the truth but because it will help them become an asset to your business and the community.

## **Develop A Hundred-Year Plan**

Planning with purpose is very different from wishful hoping. A man in an airport watched a woman with small children anxiously waiting for an arriving plane. Both their appearance and their actions caught his eye. He observed them joyfully welcome the father and husband who came off the plane. Finally, he could resist no longer and went over and said to them, “If I ever have a family, I hope to have what you have.” The father replied, “Hoping is not enough. You have to decide and plan.”

An old proverb says, “If you plan for a year, plant rice. If you plan for ten years, plant a tree. If you plan for one hundred years, *educate your children.*” In the end, we conserve only the things that we love. We love only the things we know. We know only the things we are taught. We teach by what we say; we teach more by what we do; but we teach most by what we are.

Teach your children the facts of life. Teach them money management skills and the perils of debt. Teach them social skills and servant leadership. Provide sound reading material. Nurture and admonish your children rather than hover and pamper. Children don’t come with good traits built into them; good traits must be taught. Teach them to wait their turn or wait until last. Teach them to serve others, to respect authority, to be ladies and gentlemen. Deuteronomy 6 gives the directions on whom to teach, when to teach, what to teach, and how to teach. Be diligent in teaching.

Children are a gift straight from God’s hands. They are the

sole possession we can take to heaven. Worldly ideas can creep in, convincing us that children are an inconvenient intrusion into our lives—a project for our spare time. That is not how we should view the one thing we can take with us into eternity.

What is the greatest thing we can give our children? How can we ensure they will grow up to be godly adults? An Amish bishop answered this question by saying, “Make sure that you as Mom and Dad love each other. If that is firmly in place, the rest is not as hard. If that’s not settled, you need help.” Children desperately need a safe and secure environment. They need rest, rhythm, and order. We parents are responsible to provide that safe haven—a structured home.

Four hundred fifty years ago the Mennonites wrote a 33-article *Confession of Faith*, which we find in the *Martyrs Mirror*. These articles express their faith and convictions. Not only did these Mennonites believe these articles, but they also practiced them and taught them to their families.

## **Developing Your Children**

Our goal is to raise what I call free-range children. Encourage your children to ask questions. Arouse their curiosity. Encourage adventure. Discourage entertainment and social media. Assign tasks and responsibilities early. Make your expectations clear. The more responsibility you give them, the more responsibility they will assume. Trust your children; they usually perform beyond your expectations. Allow them to take risks: it builds confidence and develops character. When they ask to do something, don’t say no unless it is absolutely necessary; rather, help them arrive at the right decision. Children need fewer rules and clearer boundaries.

Let them chase some wild ideas. Don’t rain on their parade—rather a broken bone than a broken spirit. Encourage enterprise; it develops leadership skills. Finance their projects if you want to, but do not pay for them. If their projects fail, help them pick up the pieces and cry with them, but don’t shield them from reality.

We have a fair-sized woodlot and cut lots of firewood. When the boys were young, it always looked more appealing to be running the chainsaw than picking up brush or carrying wood. For each of them, there came a time when I had to decide: are they mature enough to run the saw? If I had waited until I felt they were mature

enough, I would still be the only one running the chainsaw. But I knew that allowing them to take risks is important. I would go over the safety aspects of running the chainsaw and show them how it worked, and at some point, I would hand over the saw. Sometimes I saw mistakes coming, but I had to let them learn by experience. I learned that way, too. Nobody has Dad's hand on their shoulder all through life. Learning to function on one's own is invaluable.

## Planning Your Exit

And finally, plan your exit. *"Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live"* (Isaiah 38:1). Begin planning your

exit the day you open for business. Involve your family in developing your exit plan. Exit with dignity. Read Gary Miller's book *Going Till You're Gone*. Most parents leave some money and maybe a few assets to their descendants, but far more important is that we leave a legacy of tenets and teachings for the next generation.

God *knew* Abraham and was confident Abraham would instruct his children after him. Does God *know* you? Instructing your children in truth brings joy not only to God, but also to you. *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth"* (3 John 4).



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