



FABASA NEWSLETTER 1 of 2020

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SUBJECT

Lessons from Bees for Family-Owned Businesses



Hope is the
only **bee** that makes
honey without flowers.

Robert Green Ingersoll

PURPOSE

The purpose of bees is to sustain nature by pollinating flowers and agricultural produce. Another benefit is the production of honey. The purpose of a family-owned business is to sustain the family's livelihood from generation to generation. Another benefit is the creation of work for family members and non-family members.

SUSTAINING THE FAMILY & ECONOMY

Bees need flowers for food. A Family Business needs family members to sustain it from generation to generation. The flower again needs the bees to reproduce and family members need the family business to sustain them.

Bees play a vital role in our lives. Seed plants produce fruit after bees pollinate them by inadvertently transporting pollen from male to female flower parts. Three-quarters of flowering plants require pollinators to produce fruit. In the same way, family businesses play a vital role in all economies of the world. In South Africa, approximately 80% of registered businesses are family owned.

Most agricultural crops depend upon domesticated beehives to help with pollination. Most countries also depend on family farmers to secure the production of food. Of the 570 million commercial farmers in the world, 500 million are family farmers! In South Africa, 96% of commercial farmers are family farmers!

The United Nations declared the decade of Family Farmers. The vision of the UN Decade of Family Farming: *A world where diverse, healthy and sustainable food and agricultural systems flourish, where resilient rural and urban communities enjoy a high quality of life in dignity, equity, free from hunger and poverty. Family farming is essential to achieve this vision.*

SOUND BALANCE

The honeybees are very social insects, very much like a family. They work together and enjoy family social interaction. Arguments in the workplace can easily affect the social interaction in the family. To manage sound relationships between family members can challenge, especially if they work together.

It is therefore vital to maintain a sound balance between the interest of the business and the family. Honeybees are very social insects. Yet, they maintain a very structured social and work order. Each hive contains one queen, a few hundred drones, or male bees, and the worker bees, all female.

In the same manner, family business needs to create a strict social and work structure to safeguard the interest of the business against the whims of family members.



Think of a scale. If family considerations dominate business considerations, it will create unintended negative consequences, as seen in Figure 1 below. A sound balance between the interest of the business and family will create long-term well-intended positive consequences, as seen in Figure 2 below.

Figure 1



Figure 2



CONCLUSION

Fairness is the key to find a sound balance between the interest of the business and the family. Think of the Business as a Person. Treat it with the same respect you expect others to treat you. In the same manner, the business should respect its family members, by paying them a fair remuneration for the work they do, and remember, **Respect is the Glue that holds a family-owned business together.**

