



Insights for families in business from Dean Fowler Associates, Inc.

THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE

Legend holds that the Bermuda Triangle spells disaster for wayward travelers. Like these wayward travelers, family businesses have their own Bermuda Triangle—a communication triangle.

How often do you find yourself caught in the dangerous hold of a triangle?



They're playing "Shareholders"!

Two siblings, Bob and Jack, who both work in their family business, had a disagreement concerning their responsibilities. Tension developed in their relationship until finally Bob called his widowed mother to complain about the bad situation with his brother Jack.. His mother listened attentively and took sides with Bob. By calling his mother, Bob relieved the frustration and tension that he felt in the relationship with Jack, and transferred this anxiety and frustration to his mother by complaining over the telephone.

In this example, anger, resentment and frustration have built up between two people. To alleviate this build-up of negative energy, one of these people "downloads" these negative feelings by sharing them with a third party. A triangle has now been created.

Communication triangles are very common for families in business and are activated when anxiety, conflict, and tension develop between two people who have an emotional relationship. While triangulation patterns may be effective in the short run to decrease tension in a family business, in the long run, they are destructive to family relationships.

To improve family dynamics the "undiscussables" must be discussed, and more effective solutions must be identified so that the competing needs of family members can be addressed.

The most effective way to address the potential destructive character of these triangles is to avoid initiating the triangle in the first place. As anxiety, tensions and conflicts emerge between two parties, they should find a resolution to their differences, not simply download the frustration onto a third person. Conflict resolution techniques need to be practiced and understood:

- Attack the problem, not the person
- Listen for understanding, not to be understood
- Clarify individual needs
- Articulate specific solutions that would meet your needs

What triangles are you caught in? Try addressing your conflict directly with a family member, rather than flying into the dysfunctional seas of the Bermuda Business Triangle.

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Dean Fowler Associates, Inc.

262-789-7367

info@deanfowler.com