



262-271-5979

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## SIBLING RIVALRY - Emotional or Strategic?

By Dean R. Fowler, Ph.D.

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Sibling rivalry is a term most often associated with children; young brothers and sisters jealously struggle for their parents' attention. Rivalry may continue into adulthood, and as such it can devastate your family and undermine your business.

The rivalry between siblings actively involved in a family-owned business takes two different forms: emotional and strategic. To find solutions to resolve conflicts among brothers and sisters in family businesses, one must first determine if the rivalry is emotional or strategic, or some combination of both.

### **Emotional rivalry**

The Biblical story of the prodigal son is an example of the emotional rivalry between siblings. Who will receive the blessing from the parent? Who is the favorite? Who received the most attention? And who needs that attention now?

For many family members, the unavailability of the entrepreneurial parent who worked incessantly at the business and was emotionally absent from his or her children in their developmental years undermines the basic foundation for establishing individual self-esteem in the children.

Emotion-based sibling rivalry is the struggle to gain attention and love from parents that was missing during childhood. The adult child's actions and behaviors are directed toward gaining approval and recognition from his or her parent. This need may continue psychologically even after the death of the parent. Rather than having a strong foundation for their own self-esteem, these adult children continue their emotional craving for and dependence upon their parents' approval.

Because emotion-driven sibling rivalry is rooted in problems of self-esteem, the primary solution must be built on methods that encourage the adult development and individual maturity of each of the siblings. One must recognize that the primary problem is not, in fact, between the siblings, but rather between each child and their need for recognition from his or her parent. The real problem lies between the parent and child, not between the siblings. Consequently, the solution is not working with the sibling relationship, but with the relationship between the adult-child and the parent.

## **Strategic rivalry**

The second type of sibling rivalry is rooted in conflict over business styles and strategies rather than family emotions. While emotion-based rivalry is really about the child and the parent, strategy-based rivalry is really about the siblings. Frequently, such strategic conflict is driven by differences in personality concerning levels of financial risk.

Strategic conflict among siblings has a very different emotional content than the struggle of rivalry for parental attention. Solutions to strategic rivalry are difficult, but require business solutions, rather than psychological growth. Siblings need to develop their strategic planning, carry out good financial analysis, and explore alternative methods for ownership of as business partners. Facilitated business meetings among sibling teams or cousin consortiums is critical for finding a workable solution.

## **Finding solutions**

Businesses are often defeated by competitors when siblings battle emotionally against one another using the weapons of business strategy. When sibling conflict creates tensions within your family and business environment, make sure you first define the real underlying problem: is the core of the rivalry emotional or strategic? Then take the proper course of action consistent with the real issues. If family partners in the business have each achieved their own emotional maturity, and are no longer dependent on parental approval to feel good about themselves, then strategic business alternatives and conflicts are much easier to resolve.

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Dean Fowler Associates, Inc. 200 S. Executive Drive #101 Brookfield, WI 53005