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## Working with Family Members

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Working with family members can be everything from enjoyable, productive and rewarding to disruptive, frustrating and unpleasant. The closeness driven by work can bring family members closer together in satisfying relationships, but it can also create problems that foster hard feelings and drive people away from each other. All is dependent on the personalities of the persons involved, their understanding of their roles and their willingness to accept them, and the main management style. This fact sheet will focus on the family-owned and operated farm.

As far as the family-owned and operated farm is concerned, it's impossible to say with absolute certainty whether working with family members on day-to-day activities holds more advantages than disadvantages or vice versa; it can go either way depending on several factors, including the following:

- How much potential is there for healthy or unhealthy competition among family members? When there are more aspiring family members than there are good positions or there's limited recognition and rewards to go around, the potential for trouble is present.
- Family members will know each other much better than people who are together for work only. This can be good or bad; one can know the whole person including his strengths, capabilities, interests better while also being biased by knowledge of personal characteristics.
- Work-related problems can be taken home, where problems on the job can continue. Also, home-related problems can readily be taken to work when people who live together work together as well.
- Certain people who are together for much of their off-work time as well as every workday experience problems related to overexposure. Depending on personality and temperament, this constant togetherness can either be a strength or weakness.

For the family-owned and operated farm to be successful and with minimal problems, it is essential to set up a code of conduct:

- Everyone involved, whether family members or others, understands his/her role completely and knows who is responsible for what, the boundaries of everyone's authority, and who has the final authority when disagreements arise.
- Favoritism must be avoided at all times even if it is only a perception of favoritism.

- Everyone involved is subject to the same rules and policies and equal treatment. This is particularly imperative where disciplinary issues are concerned.

Some rules you may want to follow:

1. Keep discussions about your personal family matters out of the workplace
2. Keep a business atmosphere
3. Don't bring up personal matters during business discussions
4. Help employees understand that this is a business
5. Define your personal/home boundaries for your employees
6. Understand what information is to be kept confidential
7. Leave work issues at work, don't bring them home with you

First, follow the golden rule: Make sure that everything that occurs, including the delegation of authority and responsibility, decision-making, promotions, rewards, demotions, praise and salary increases, is based on concrete and clearly stated knowledge, skills, abilities and personality traits.

Second, leave your family issues at home. While this can often seem impossible, it must be attempted. Relatives may have grown up together, may have played, competed, collaborated, loved and hated each other at one time, but the workplace is not an environment in which you and your relatives should play out or resolve your childhood or adult problems.

Instead, each family member should strive to interact with other relatives involved in the farm operation in the same neutral manner they use when interacting with non-family members. If they can't manage a non-neutral stance, expect disaster ahead for your work environment and your farm operation outcomes.

Third, you must establish clear channels for communication. There are always ways to work the system and to go to a favorite relative to get the task resolved. Invariably, this means going over or around the proper individual. And that can seem preferable, especially if the proper individual is a relative who is not well liked. But that shouldn't be allowed. When this happens, old family rivalries and patterns emerge that can further complicate an already complicated issue.

The best way to avoid these and similar experiences is to drop interpersonal dislikes and deal directly with the individual involved. Based on these rules, the goal is to treat family and non-family alike in all situations.

## Working For or With Your In-Laws

Working for or with your in-laws has different challenges and opportunities. If you have a good relationship with your in-laws, working with them might be a opportunity. For others, it might create special challenges in your personal life and at home. Contemplate all of the possibilities and challenges before you get too excited.

### Items to consider when working for or with your In-Laws

When working for or with your in-laws, you have to remember that they are the owners. You will have to follow their procedures. If you come to disagreement about something in the farm operation, it could impact your personal and home life. Giving constructive suggestions is good. Accepting that they may turn down your suggestion might be a little more difficult. If your personal relationship with your in-laws is not strong then seek employment elsewhere.

Finances seem to become an issue in many family farm operations. Your in-laws may pay you more simply because you are their in-law. This could be a good thing or a bad thing depending on where you are situated. Your in-laws might expect you to work for less than their other employees. Chances are you will be compensated the same as all the other employees. Some problems could arise when you ask for a raise or other favors. On the other hand, it may be harder for you to approach your in-laws for a pay raise than a supervisor who is not related. Your work hours may be different from other employees. Expectations of you might be different with additional responsibilities or coverage. Understand that you are just as likely to be dismissed during downsizing or when finances are limited or reduced. Know this is a possibility and have a plan in place that allows you to move to other employment.

Getting promoted could work out fine if you are promoted based on performance and not because you are an in-law. Being promoted because you are an in-law may create a barrier between you and your co-workers if they see it as nepotism. There will always workers that wish to stir up conflict. Be sure that you are willing to take the criticism that this might

bring before you start to work.

One positive item about working for and with the in-laws farm operation is that you get the opportunity to learn about the whole farm operation. This is invaluable if the farm operation is passed down at a later time. Understanding the whole farm operation is an excellent way to learn more about the family and how it functions.

Working for or with your in-laws farm operation might not have been what you had planned for your life. It does have its positive and negative points you need to consider. You may be around your in-laws more than you initially wanted to be. You may also build a closer relationship with them.