



Sometimes, family members don't want to be tied into the family, they want their freedom. In that case, let them go.

Sometimes the role of the family advisor is not about helping a family stay united. Sometimes the role of the family adviser is to help the family members untangle themselves in a gentle way that avoids unnecessary family conflict.

The role of the family advisor is to help families to be honest about the future and what they really want, which could be totally different from what the first generation founder wants. In practice, often families cannot see their own transitions, systems of dynamics.

They are not conscious of the obstacles. Sometimes, families are not organised and fail to do basic planning for the future, so they need a little push. What then is the role of the advisor, vis-a-vis the family system?

The advisor to a family can provide education, they can help to motivate, they can model and teach, they can help families to be more organised and they can encourage families to plan ahead. They can make sure the family is having at least an annual family meeting. The advisor can act as a sounding board, to help family members talk through their own ideas. The advisor can help normalise the situation, by pointing out that the challenges the family faces are not unique to them. The advisor can make the family members start thinking about their emotional commitment to the family business, provide technical advice and bring an outside perspective.

If the goal is family unity, and if the family group needs to be properly organised and choose a system of family governance, an important area to focus on is communication. Are the family communication patterns and dynamics consistent with the more businesslike approach this level of organisation requires?

It is easier for the advisor to see the big picture, and to see the transitions the family is facing. An advisor could share experience based on what other families are doing and may be able to see some of the family dynamics that are proving to be an obstacle. An outside advisor can question family rules and messages, if they are appropriate or not, helpful or unhelpful.

Sometimes it is very helpful just to have a third-party professional present to help facilitate a family conversation or brainstorming session. This does not imply that the family members are having any difficulty in communicating themselves. It is just that often, a formal process for facilitation or brainstorming can generate some new results.

Advisors can give a family advice, but families need to take the responsibility for implementing the advice.

Ultimately the family have to do their own work. The family members must have a feeling of contribution and ownership to any governance system that the family decide to adopt. This means there may be limited value in searching for "off the shelf" solutions and model documents (such as a template "family constitution".) This is one area where it pays not to take short cuts.

Jay Hughes, in his book "Family: The Compact Among Generations", says that the role of the advisor is to look at the family system and assess whether the individual relationships in that family system are trending towards entropy, fission (conflict) or fusion (synergy). He says that you do not need to be a family therapist in order to intuit whether a relationship is an entropic one or if there is conflict or synergy. When the advisor has made these observations from outside the family system, their role may be to ask the family members the questions that will make them think about their relationships and these questions can be the trigger that makes the family member take action towards change.

An advisor can help the members of a family think about a change model or process. For example the advisor can keep the family members focused on identifying and removing the obstacles to change.

If there is significant resistance, for example strong conflict or negative behaviours, the role of the family advisor would include helping family members think about whether the goal of

family unity is a realistic one ?or whether the family or its members can be helped by an expert mediator, a person with skills in conflict resolution or a counsellor or therapist.

Even in a healthy family, there will be many skills to learn and many topics to be educated on. No one advisor is going to be an expert on everything. The role of the family advisor also extends to helping find the right experts who can come in to help educate a family, teach new skills or to guide and mentor the family members.

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