

Can We Talk?

Case Studies:
Turning
Conflict into
Cohesion



This blog is written to help family members and professionals better understand the type of challenges we encounter, our approaches and the desired outcomes of our work. Names and specific family dynamics have been disguised to protect the privacy of clients and the confidentiality of our professional relationships.

Often Spencer Legacy Group professionals are asked to describe the types of family dynamics we observe and that our clients engage us to help them address. Every family is unique, of course, and built upon particular histories comprised of economic and emotional growth, marriages and births, failures and triumphs and family narratives that are incomparable. Yet, in our work at SLG, patterns, themes and shared challenges do emerge. Below are five unique case studies.

Approaches

The power and successful outcomes of our practice can be characterized by the depth of experience of individual colleagues and the combined, aligned focus of our efforts as a team to serve the client family as a system. We take on an engagement as a team to impact on, and benefit an entire family system. We do not advise families on finances.

In general, our professional practice focuses on listening very carefully to the needs and interests of all family members. We seek to go beyond positions that individual family members have taken, or the private perceptions they have identified, and take steps to understand and serve the entire family system, composed of these varying viewpoints and perspectives. Three-quarters of the time, the presenting problem identified by the family is not the challenge that the family ultimately works to resolve. Our efforts are centered on pin pointing illusive issues and focused on defining family issues in ways that the problems can be better understood and resolved.

Our approach involves targeting perceived negative dynamics and working with the family to collaboratively address problems so that the family can be in better alignment to make critical decisions, live in greater harmony and confront threats to their desired legacy. Our goal is to help them turn internal conflicts into cohesion. Our job is not to judge, direct or manage, but rather we facilitate the family to achieve their own objectives and desired outcomes.

The success of our approach is a product of decades of experience in the high net worth family space. We not only know what we are doing, but believe we add value to the stickiness of family relationships, and provide at times, transformative interventions in difficult and trying environments. We are honored by the trust families put in us.

5 Case Studies

The Robin Family

With the leadership of their third generation family business facing transition to a new set of family members, Gen 3 had questions about the individual competencies and suitability of Gen 4 to take on management of family affairs. This caused stress and conflict in the family. A historic lack of information sharing in the family prevented adequate preparation, development and focus for upcoming Gen 4 leaders, and unwelcomed marriages introduced new spouses and stakeholders into the family.

SLG was retained to restore trust and communication within the family. We began this engagement with a Snapshot Assessment of individual perceptions and solutions to family issues. This consists of individual family member interviews and feedback to the family as a whole. After achieving agreement of the family on the various challenges of the family, we moved to identify solution paths to undertake in facilitating the family to work through their issues. The period of engagement with the client was six months, including the resolution of side issues and conflicts between family members.

The Dove Family

A very large and historic American family shared a real estate asset that represented great financial value, cherished family memories and considerable consternation about what to do with it. The older Gen 2 family leaders were legally tasked with what to do with the asset, although the emerging Gen 3 leaders had strong opinions about what should be the best course of action. The family challenge became symbolic for the entire family, and each day that the issue remained unresolved triggered and ignited other concerns. The family was aware that the ultimate disposition of the family property was in public view. Principals of SLG were retained to assess the situation and facilitate a solution. Recognizing that there was not adequate parity among the generations involved, we took efforts to empower the voice of the younger generation to bring to the table fresh ideas and an elevated ownership of the family problem. Alternative uses and ownership arrangements for the real estate asset were explored and communicated throughout the family. Ultimately, 54 family cousins agreed and proposed acceptable solutions to the Patriarch of the family.

The Finch Family

A moderate size Gen 2 family was the beneficiary of the wealth-creating efforts of their Gen 1 parents in a hotel-chain dynasty. Some family members were recognized, and participating leaders in the family business, while other family members were not. A senior professional management team collaboratively provided guidance and assistance in managing the business. Conflict existed in the family on the issue of needed reinvestment of profits in the family business, versus the desire by some family members for increased profit sharing to all family members. Professional managers were caught up in the tension between family members and their roles to act on behalf of the business, not the family. SLG was initially engaged to focus on family business issues. As a result of the interviewing and assessment process, we uncovered the tension in the family, and drilled down into the foundational issues embedded in their family dynamics.

We were able to step to the side of the professional managers as well as share the perceived needs and interests of family members to reach a satisfactory accommodation.

The Gull Family

Owners of a successful beverage distribution company and family-owned market chain were confronted with three imposing challenges in the same year. First the family business was required to invest heavily in new technology for better customer service and inventory tracking due to competition in their industries. Second the aging wealth-creating brothers running the business both suffered health issues and there was no apparent family leadership in place to step up to the critical void created by their unexpected illness. Third, jealousies existed in the extended family over real and imagined slights that had been bouncing around the family for years. With the reality of an economic hit felt by the family, sadness and shock over the uncles' ill-health, and personal tensions forming barriers to trust and common action, the family was hurting. Our involvement was to connect the family with suitable financial partners to seek innovative solutions regarding their investments; conduct one-to-one dyad conflict resolution sessions; and finally engage those members of the family working in the family business in problem solving sessions to develop and agree on next steps to fill the gaps in the family's executive management plan.

The Lark Family

The tight and harmonious environment was challenged in this successful family when the oldest son chose to marry a woman that was deemed unacceptable to other family members. Not only was she a practicing follower of a different religion, but also the woman grew up in a

different region of the country and was viewed as “simply different.” This challenge to the family’s self-identity and structure was further aggravated when the couple conceived two children that the wife held hostage from the original wealth-creator grandparents as a perceived punishment for their hostile reception of her. As the son began to step into a leadership role in the family business, the level of antagonism began to bleed over into the work force, and beyond the immediate family. The role of SLG was to encircle the family and head off further collateral damage in the family business. We worked with the wealth creators and their son to better understand the family dynamics and successfully sought reconciliation with the daughter-in-law.

At the Spencer Legacy Group, our multi-disciplinary team of experts can make a difference in the conflicts that threaten your family or your clients. When its time to talk about the elephant in the room, give us a call at 800 694-0059 or find us online at www.spencerlegacygroup.com.

