

Can We Talk?

Erosion of
Trust in Family
Conflicts



***“Trust is
built with
consistency.”***

Lincoln Chafee

“Family quarrels are bitter things. They don’t go according to any rules. They’re not like aches or wounds, they’re more like splits in the skin that won’t heal because there’s not enough material.” F. Scott Fitzgerald

The intersection of trust is at the heart of all relationships. A family contains an emotional vault of family emotions, stress, and conflict and the dynamics of the family extend into the hearts, minds, wellbeing and success of the professionals and friends who support the family.

A 2012 Harvard Business Review study revealed that 70% of family-owned businesses fail before the second generation ever got a chance to take over from the wealth creators. The Harvard study found that the legacy of high net worth families is often eroded by lack of trust that leads to family feuds, oversized egos, negative emotions or poor communication. Many successful families do overcome such obstacles by shifting the family dialogue from solely related to building wealth to building strong bonds based upon trust within the family.

Families are among the safest of social systems, yet they can also be the most intense. We observe the agony of family conflicts, in part because we have comfort that we can say or do anything as our family will still love us. That is often not the reality.

Wealthy families, who appear from the outside to have everything, may yearn for that which they do not have, or cannot seem to create even with their wealth, namely a close, functional, multi-generational family.

Families may fight over a divorce, marriage, sale of an asset or whether to stay in business together. These are typical scenarios where trust has been eroded that give rise to the challenges that threaten the family’s fabric of

Without trust fear rules.

shared values and common experience.

The use of emotional control is perhaps the strongest and most damaging weapon that impacts families when there is conflict. Underlying control is the absence of an “I win – you win” relationship, as it takes a deep foundation of trust.

Trust is the cornerstone of all relationships. It is the act of placing confidence in someone or something else. Without trust, fear rules. While there are many other challenges and interventions to overcome them, addressing trust is often core to managing a family conflict.

Certain life experiences can impact a person’s ability to trust others. Family can often be the people closest to you or the ones that can inflict the deepest emotional wounds. Broken trust within a family can be devastating and hinder the functionality of the family unit.

When trust is not present, relationships may suffer.

What are the common signs and symptoms of trust issues? A fundamental assumption is that everyone has uncertainty about whom to trust, how much to trust or when not to trust. Every day we each make decisions on questions of trust, and at times we are more willing to trust than other times. A total lack of trust of everyone would indicate a serious psychological problem, so it is a good thing that we make trust decisions all the time, since our judgments about trust help keep us safe and alive.

Within a family there are signs that there may be excessive mistrust such as:

- A total lack of intimacy or friendship due to mistrust,
- Mistrust that interferes with one’s primary relationship with a spouse,
- Several intensely dramatic and stormy relationships

Ways to Build Trust

- Be authentic and honest
- Communicate effectively, using clarity and active listening
- Control impulsive decision making, check with others
- Be reliable, fulfilling shared expectations
- Admit mistakes and forgive the mistakes of others
- Do the right thing, step to the side of others
- Avoid self-promotion, seek collaborative approaches
- Express yourself clearly, respect others

either at the same time or sequentially between siblings, parent-child, or even spouses.

- Constant thoughts of suspicion or anxiety about family and friends,
- Terror during physical intimacy, and
- A belief that others are deceptive and malevolent without real evidence.

Mistrust can play a significant role within a family especially if past betrayals or disappointments are at the core of the issue. Parents abandoning children in their emotional moment of need can be devastating with lifetime consequences.

Trust issues can arise based upon experiences and interactions in childhood, for example, if one did not receive adequate nurturing, affection or acceptance. If, as an adolescent one experienced social rejection within a family by being treated as an outcast, or as an adult, a loved one was lost, there may be issues with trusting others to feel safe and secure.

Relationships fail primarily because of a lack of loyalty or lack of honest communication and mutuality, due to lack or loss of trust.

Fortunately, one can learn to trust again.

So, how is trust built and maintained in family relationships? Once broken trust must be built incrementally. We must demonstrate that we are trustworthy in small things and then build on the newly woven threads of trust. Building trust takes time, patience and forgiveness on the part of both parties to the relationship.

There are four critical factors in ensuring trust resides in a relationship:

- 1) Values – a common set of values and a willingness to respect those that do not overlap is essential to a mutual recognition of priorities that reduce dissention.
- 2) Integrity – the predictability of honesty and consistency.
- 3) Mutuality – this refers to working as a family within the relationship and is crucial to sustained trust.
- 4) Commitment – loyalty is important so that the relationship efforts are not in vain.

Trust can ebb or flow over time, so continuing to adjust and commit to a relationship is important to receive trust, respect and love, in return. In summary, addressing trust issues is crucial to securing a family's legacy.

Family quarrels can result in positive outcomes if family members seek to build on the underlying trust that defines a successful family.

Allow the Spencer Legacy Group to show you how we can help your family overcome the issues that might sabotage your success. When it's time to talk about the elephant in the room, give us a call at 1-800-694-0059, or find us online at www.spencerlegacygroup.com.

