

Franchising & Family Relationships

By Greg Nathan

Many franchisees involve their spouse in the business. While this is a great way to build something together it also creates challenges which need to be managed. Research by our psychologists at the Franchise Relationships Institute has shown that the quality of a franchisee's family relationships will have a significant impact on the performance of their business.



Here are some tips to help you maintain happy, fulfilling family relationships as you face the inevitable pressures of growing a business.

Vision: A vision is simply how you see things working out. What is your vision of how you want your business and your family to function? It helps to have specific written goals in both these areas. When setting goals consider what is of fundamental importance in your life. Review these weekly.

Finances: Calculate how much money you need to support your family. Then work out the revenues and profit targets your business needs to achieve so you can have the lifestyle you want.

Hours: Decide on how many hours you are each prepared to put into the business and what sacrifices are you not prepared to make. Also consider who will attend to the household chores as these can become a source of resentment.

Security: How much financial risk can you both live with? While it's not a comfortable topic, you need to talk about the possibility that the business could struggle or even fail. What would this mean for the family? How much security are you each prepared to give up?

Children: How might the business impact on your kids and what can you do to ensure their needs are being met? If you are not home enough, don't use the excuse "I am doing this for you!" It won't wash. Are you putting aside time to do the things your kids want to do?

Authority: Agree on who, ultimately, is the boss and who is responsible for specific areas. Also ensure there are guidelines on how money will be spent in the business and the family, and who needs to be consulted before final decisions are made.

Flexibility: Things seldom go exactly to plan so flexibility is vital. Agree on how often you will review how things are progressing in the business and the family. It is likely that you will need to adjust and accommodate to changing circumstances.

Tolerance: Working and living together is likely to magnify your differences. What quirks do you each have that may get on each other's nerves under pressure. You probably chose your partner because they complement you. Value each other's strengths and skills and use them to the business' advantage.

Support: You will need to cover for each other when one of you is under extra pressure or feeling "under the weather". If you are married here's a refreshing exercise. Go back through your wedding vows and revisit the commitments you made!

Care: See if you can really understand what your partner values and needs from you. A great book to read on how to do this is "The 5 Love Languages" by Gary Chapman.

Conflict: Don't push too hard to get your own way if you think this will create resentment. It is seldom worth it. Where there are serious frustrations that you can't get past don't let them fester. Put your pride aside and talk with a friend to get a fresh perspective or book a few sessions with a relationship counselor.

Fun: Running a business can be a lot of fun. There is nothing worse than working and living with a "Sam Serious" or a "Sad Sack" who always has a cloud over their head. Lighten up. Look for the ridiculous in everyday life. Have a laugh at your own expense. Your bonus will be more energy and you'll get more done.

Well-being: Speaking of energy, it is important to stay well, especially when the pressure is on. Talk about what you both can do to keep healthy. Schedule time to do something you enjoy each week - individually and as a couple - and build a personal health program into your weekly schedule.

Outside support: Encourage your extended family to take a positive interest in what you are doing, and cultivate friends who are supportive of your business. If family members are being negative about the business you may need to ask them to mind their own business!

I hope these tips have been useful. I refer to them myself from time to time! While it is important that franchisors have profitable partnerships with their franchisees, it is just as important that we all have profitable partnerships with our families.