

CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?

***DEALING WITH CONFLICT
IN A FARM BUSINESS
&
FARM BUSINESS MEETINGS –
A FACILITATED MEETING MODEL***

**Developed for:
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DEALING WITH CONFLICT IN A FARM BUSINESS TRANSITION

THE NATURE OF CONFLICT

- **Normal part of life**
- **Few people are comfortable with conflict**
- **Resolution becomes more difficult when conflict is ignored**
- **Value conflicts are common**
- **Conflict is a difference between people – it can be real or perceived**

RECOGNIZE CONFLICT WHEN . . .

- **Communication is fractured**
- **Parties are avoiding each other**
- **Emotions are heightened**
- **Parties are at impasse and cannot agree**

SOURCES OF CONFLICT IN A FARM BUSINESS TRANSITION

- **Generational differences**
- **Differing values**
- **Confusion over roles**
- **Financial decisions**
- **Hidden agendas**
- **Power disparities**
- **Shortage of capital combined with excess labor**
- **Lack of leadership & commitment by older party for making the transition work**
- **Timing of transfer of management responsibilities and/or ownership**
- **Personnel management**
- **Consideration of personal assets vs. business assets**
- **Unclear goals, differing goals and/or lack of written goals**
- **Lack of a written transfer plan**
- **No clear decision making process**
- **Unresolved prior conflicts**

HOW DO WE SOLVE PROBLEMS?

- **Conduct a business meeting with a clear agenda and established ground rules**
- **Focus on the relationship**
- **Look past the position to find the real interest**
- **Use an agreed upon problem-solving model (see attached SOCS model)**
- **Use a facilitated meeting model**
- **Participate in mediation with a trained neutral professional**

S O C S

A Problem-Solving Model

Situation — **O**ptions — **C**onsequences — **S**olution

Situation

Define the situation from many perspectives.

Does the situation have:

A financial perspective?

A social perspective?

A legal perspective?

An emotional perspective?

A personal perspective?

A family perspective?

A religious perspective?

A community perspective?

Does the situation affect your personal goals?

Does the situation affect your business goals?

Does the situation affect the mission of the business?

What are the moral implications of the situation?

Options

It is necessary to explore at least two options that can resolve the situation.

Do not create an option that becomes an immediate solution.

Do not reject any option.

Be non-judgmental.

Consequences

List the positive and negative consequences associated with each option.

Solution

Select the option that has the most positive and least negative consequences both in terms of quality and quantity.

Getting Ready for a Facilitated Farm Business Meeting

Prior to beginning a facilitated model for farm business meetings, work with all of the stakeholders to establish a mutually acceptable framework. It is helpful to record these policies in written form for reference.

Who will facilitate the meetings?

- Stakeholders take turns
- One stakeholder agrees to facilitate all business
- Outside neutral facilitator

What meeting schedule will we use?

- Determine how often to meet. Will this change depending on time of year?
- Plan for “emergency” meetings?
- Agree on day of the week and a time of day
- What about when somebody cannot be at the meeting?

What meeting ground rules can we agree to follow?

- Role of the facilitator
- Talk one at a time
- Honest conversation
- Respect each other

What criteria should we use for decision-making?

- Financial impact
- Family values
- Short-term or long-term impact
- Stability/growth

Who will be included in the decision making process?

- Older farmer(s) and/or younger farmer(s)
- On-the-farm family members
- Off-the-farm family members
- Farm workers
- Non-family members (financial advisors, etc.)

How will we make decisions?

- Who will be included in the decision making process?
- Majority vote
- Consensus
- One person designated as the decision maker for the group

How will we deal with the conflicts which occur?

- Conflicts in the workplace
- Conflicts at the meetings
- Family conflicts
- Unresolved conflict

The Role of the Facilitator

Getting people to the meeting

Make sure everyone is invited – don't assume

Timing is everything

How often will the group meet?

Will we meet more often or less often during specific times of the year?

What day(s) of the week? What time of the day works best?

Allow enough time for the meeting

The meeting site is important

What location will minimize or eliminate interruptions?

Shall we rotate or meet in the same place each time?

Opening the meeting

Define the ground rules and the structure of the meeting

Set the agenda or review the agenda if set prior to the meeting

Managing the process

The facilitator is in charge of the process

Record keeping – major point on chalk board, follow-up with written summary

Provide information continuity for meetings

Personal interaction

Model neutrality

Speak so others can hear and understand

Check in with all parties (verbally and/or with eye contact)

Set the “tone” of the session

Model importance

Maintain appropriate “pace” – do not rush but keep people on task

Create a safe environment for people to interact

Keep anyone from “losing face”

Managing communication

Model active listening

Identify who is talking to whom (encourage silent people to speak)

Shift the communication if appropriate

“Listen” for what is not being said or is being avoided

Deal with emotions

Affirm/validate

Reframe to move intensity up or down

Link emotions to behaviors

Make sure all parties are heard

Clarification

- Help parties express their ideas
- Promote an understanding of each person's situation, feelings, motives
- Slow down the conversation
- Reality-test proposed solutions (play it out to the logical or illogical end)

Conflict analysis

- Remove "outer layers" of conflict to get to the real issue (widen/narrow issues)
- Make connections – similarities, points of agreement/non-agreement
- Use a problem-solving model
- Conceptualize (may be a question of respect, etc.)
- Contrast and compare information – don't judge

Assist in problem-solving

- Ask what it would take for people to be satisfied
- Review positive and negative consequences of solution (benefits/risks)
- Include facts and feelings
- Look at short term and long term effect
- Think about all areas – financial, legal, families, etc.
- Develop criteria for decision-making
- Encourage creativity and flexibility

Closure

- Thank people for their work
- Summarize major points identified
- Where do we go from here? Who will do what action?
- Follow-up with a written summary of the meeting

Family Meeting Format

WELCOME

- Affirm the importance of the meeting
- Get people focused on the meeting

REVIEW OF GROUND RULES

- Facilitated meeting model
- Speak one at a time
- Respect each other
- Everyone participates
- Honest conversation
- No talking about the “real” issues after the meeting

DEVELOP THE AGENDA

- Review of written record from last meeting
- Establish a time schedule for current meeting
- Identification of issues – write issues from each aspect on chalk board
 - Personal, emotional, familial
 - Conflict situations which have occurred since the last meeting
 - Immediate business issues
 - Long-term planning business issues
 - Family/business values review

WORK THROUGH THE ISSUES

- Take each issue seriously
- Don't forget the relationship
- “Table” conversation on issues which require additional information
- Develop options and then reality-test
- Follow established criteria for decision-making (establish in advance)

REACH AGREEMENT AND CLOSURE

- Facilitator summarize points of agreement and decisions made
- Clarify who will do what and time-frames
- Identify the issues to be carried over to the next meeting
- Written detail/summary of the meeting