



Family Matters

By Kelly R. Thompson

The pros and cons of working with family

Ring, ring. “Good afternoon. This is Kelly with Moti-Vitality ... No thank you, I’m not in the market for a Disney Cruise at this time.”

I really should learn to ignore the toll-free numbers and the “unknown callers.”

I knew telemarketing calls would be part of the price I would have to pay, however, when I made the decision to use my cell phone as my primary business number so that I could be more accessible to my clients.

I end the call and go back to scouring resumes for a client who asked us to hire a sales professional.

Ring, ring.

Does anyone’s cell phone actually “ring” anymore? Mine plays a short section of “What’s Up” by the 4 Non Blondes. But this time it is not a toll-free number, so I answer again:

“Good afternoon. Thank you for calling Moti-Vitality. This is Kelly.”

On the phone is the owner of a dealership with whom I have spoken several times before, as he has participated in our sales and CWS-I education. His son was registered for the current CWS-I webinar series, but I had noticed that he had not logged into the live classes or taken any of the online sample quizzes.

This is fairly common. An owner might suggest that a salesperson or other employee take a Water Quality Assn. prep course or review materials on my website, and although the employee agrees at the time, he does not follow through in utilizing the educational tools available to him. What makes things more challenging is that that person who lacks the drive to further his knowledge is often a family

member, meaning it is not just a simple matter of replacing him with someone who has more initiative.

I do not know the exact percentage of family owned water treatment dealerships across the country, but it is quite common in this industry. At least half of my clients fit a similar profile: The dealership, which was started by the grandfather, was originally a plumbing or well drilling company that took on water treatment as a side business. As the industry grew, water treatment became the primary focus. The father (son of the founder) grew up working for his dad. He started by doing salt deliveries and perhaps some installations. He graduated from high school, but did not necessarily go to college. Regardless of education level, he is intelligent and has a strong work ethic. After leaving his dad’s company for a short time, he came back and moved up through different positions. At some point, the grandfather either passed away or retired, but by this time the father had a son (or son-in-law, in some cases) of his own who eventually would come to work for the dealership.

I have found that many of these dealerships share a few of other commonalities. It was usually the grandfather, and then the father, who made most of the sales. If the company has a dedicated salesperson, it often is someone who seemingly has been there forever. The service department usually consists of one or two employees who have been there for a long time, too, and who, along with the grandfather/father, account for most of the dealership’s sales.

Now comes the son. He is a decent guy, but he did not have to work as

hard as his father did growing up, although he may not realize it. His work ethic may not be as strongly developed as his father’s, and he has not experienced the stresses of business ownership. He might have the drive and desire to effectively take over the business, but he does not always have the knowledge or management experience, because the father has not had time to teach him, due to the fact that he wears so many hats at the dealership.

Now the father is looking at retirement within five years. The company is profitable, but this is heavily reliant on the work the father does. The company does not produce a high enough revenue stream for the father to step away and maintain a decent income while the son takes over.

What happens over the next five years can determine what happens for the fourth generation. There are some key questions to be asked and decisions to be made.

Are decisions motivated by family or business?

This is a tough question that must be answered honestly. If the family member were not a family member, would he or she still have a job there? It seems like a simple question, but the answer is critical. If you allow any of the team members to receive a paycheck for sub-standard performance, then sub-standard results will likely follow. In addition, it will be more challenging to hire people from outside of the family if performance standards are different for family and non-family employees.

I am not suggesting that having



Unparalleled customer service and technical support



Aqua Wholesale is your *complete* OEM warehouse.

We offer complete lines of residential, commercial and industrial water treatment equipment; stocking most of the major manufacturers in the industry.

Aqua Wholesale focuses on our customers' needs and earning their respect by building long-term partnerships based on mutual trust and quality, full-time efficient services.

800-591-1094

www.aqua-wholesale.com
Sarasota, Florida

YOUR FIRST CHOICE FOR WATER TREATMENT SOLUTIONS.

Write in 772

business solutions

a company that can support family is a bad thing. We have a client in Maryland who made it clear that he cares far less about profit and growth than about being able to support his immediate and extended family. As it turns out, he has a competent son who is moving into the leadership role and really cares about the business. This father knows some of his decisions are family member based, and, frankly, I am impressed with his priorities. This article is not a condemnation of one attitude or the other—I do believe, however, that a company can only grow so much if decisions are motivated by family ties.

We have another client who is grooming his son-in-law to manage or eventually take over the company. The son-in-law does not have the respect for the company that the aging father has. He is not well liked or respected by the employees and rarely is willing to work as hard as those he is supposed to be leading. Our company was asked to guide the son-in-law and teach him how to manage the department. However, we cannot force someone to have a strong work ethic. We can suggest that the owner holds his entire team accountable for the changes that need to be made and for a higher expectation of professionalism, but if he is not willing because it will cause family conflict, then we will respectfully decline involvement. In order to

achieve maximum growth and profitability, change has to occur and accountability has to be supported.

Do conflicts from home follow employees to the office?

There is a reason some large corporate businesses have no spouse, no family or no dating policies—it is tough to keep the disagreements that are natural and common in every relationship from coming to work, and when tension is in the air, productivity drops. That being said, I personally dislike the corporate office environment. I like the idea of being able to spend time with my family while providing security for them. I dream of my kids someday working as part of the Moti-Vitality team (something they both, as teenagers, deny will ever happen. We'll see). But a policy has to be made and followed to make it clear that the work environment is not a sparring ring for working out family issues. Family members need to be able to see the bigger picture.

Does anyone know how or have time to grow?

Perhaps the biggest challenge of a small family business is knowing how to grow. Even if there is a strong desire from the leading family members, there may not be anyone in the organization who has ever been trained or has experience in developing a sales department or hiring and training a water treatment sales professional.

Even if the knowledge exists, with all of the hats being worn, it is difficult to find the time to hire, train and manage a growing team. Many companies choose to hire a sales manager, or even just one sales professional, but others may not have the capital to make this investment. This is when looking at your family for support begins to take on new meaning. Sit down with your family. Communicate your goals and how each member fits into future plans. Think of your business as an Amish barn raising: Everyone must work hard toward a common goal.

The growth of your business and the future of your loved ones is why family matters. *wqp*

Kelly R. Thompson, CWS VI, CI, is president of Moti-Vitality LLC. Thompson can be reached at kellyt@moti-vitality.com or 810.560.2788.

For more information on this subject write in 1007 on this issue's reader service card.

DON'T MISS OUT!

2013 Groundwater Expo

A Sound Investment

December 3-6 • Nashville, Tennessee • USA










Make a sound investment in your future by attending this year's NGWA Groundwater Expo!

<p>DISCOVER SOLUTIONS</p> <p>Explore the exhibit hall—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open 12 hours over two days • Hundreds of exhibitors • Scores of new products 	<p>IMPROVE YOUR BOTTOM LINE</p> <p>Learn what's new during workshops on—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groundwater industry practices • Business management • Safety and more 	<p>EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS</p> <p>Grow professionally and personally—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with thousands of your peers • Gain insight about new opportunities • Discuss future possibilities
---	--	---

www.GroundwaterExpo.com • 800 551.7379 • 614 898.7791

Write in 771