

Printing their own story

WORKING RELATIONSHIPS | A family business whose success is based on trust

BY PETER DEVRIES

Imagine sharing a goodbye kiss with your spouse before heading off to work, and then sharing another one when you arrive at the office. Husband and wife team **Glen and Bonnie Rowley**, owners of **Glenmore Printing & Imaging**, have been doing that for the past 30 years.

She believes the shared investment acts as a great motivator. "Let's face it, nobody has the total interest that your significant other would have. We have the same interest in the company, so we're coming at it from the same perspective."

She keeps the books while her husband Glen runs operations, and she sees the partitioning of responsibilities as not only one of the best ways to avoid conflict but also a great way to remain productive.

By ensuring each family member is provided a measure of autonomy and the space to perform individually, their contributions to the collective effort are given the chance to thrive.

"You really do have to trust one another in the role that you play. And communication is key, obviously. But I also think

you have to have different areas of responsibility. You can't be in each other's pockets."

They've now more fully involved their son **James Rowley**, who went from doing small jobs to driving the company truck. He now manages the business.

Glen credits James with carrying the business into the next generation. "James is well educated, he has a business degree, and he's able to put some very sound business practices [in play]," he said.

James' vision for the future has helped Glen to choose between letting the business wind down or carrying it forward. He's choosing the latter. "It appears now that we're successfully moving into a second generation, full speed ahead."

What's James doing differently? "He spends money," said Glen. "He's realized that for Glenmore, productivity and profitability [can be] increased by pulling things in under our own roof." That's meant restructuring and buying more equipment. It's also been fodder for greater disagreement.

"I've always done things sort of slow and steady," said Glen. "I've had to let go and accept that some of this change is really good, [even though] it goes against some of the old principles that I've held."

But James' more aggressive approach hasn't hampered family relations. Even if there's conflict with James over decisions, said Glen, at the end of the day, he can't escape the fact that James is his son. Glen's also learned to believe in James' decisions. "It's about trust," he said.

Francine Carlin, principal at **Business Harmonizer Group**, who has counseled and mentored scores of families in business together, says trust is critical to making family businesses work. She's seen the horror stories for those without it.

What are the most common issues she encounters? "Elephants in the room," she said. "[It might be] spousal dynamics, definition and roles of workers [versus] owners, or the interpersonal relationships between generations."

She recommends three pillars for building successful family businesses. First, she said, people must be willing to separate their personal involvement with family members from the behaviours or the events that take place in the

workplace. This is the only way to ensure family members feel safe in talking about business issues that can be challenging and sensitive.

Second, family members must be willing to let go of the personal past. Hanging on to old hurts and harbouring grudges hampers business.

"Thirdly is to create a governance structure that can help maintain boundaries," she said. "This can help guide a family's relationship to the business and ensure accountability and transparency."

She's also learned to identify the hallmarks of those who will succeed. "Courage and a willingness to face the emotional nature of [the process] are key. [Families in business should] want to continue the legacy of the founders and should have a passion for building a community that can be left to their [heirs]."

Courage doesn't seem to be a problem for the heir to the Rowleys' business, for whom James' inclusion has, in the eyes of his parents, been the right decision.

"He's put new life into it," said Bonnie. "At the end of the day [Glen and I] look at each other and say, 'Oh yeah, that was a good idea.'"



Francine Carlin, principal at **Business Harmonizer Group**: courage is required to face the emotional nature of running a family business