

The Forest for the Trees

To enjoy the holidays—keep family business at work

BY TOM HUBLER

I've been a film buff for years and each holiday season I try to watch something from my list of favorites. Top of my list is "The Bishop's Wife," a 1947 film (remade with Denzel Washington in recent years) originally starring Loretta Young, Cary Grant and David Niven.

The story is about a bishop and his wife who are involved in a parish life. The bishop is driven to raise money for a new cathedral at the expense of everything else in his parish including his family. In the midst of the holiday season and beleaguered by his responsibilities, he asks God for help to relieve the pressure. God sends him an angel (Cary Grant) who, through a series of tricks, helps the bishop realize that his real mission in life is not to build a cathedral but to serve the needs of his parishioners.

In family businesses the family can become focused on building a cathedral (the business) at the expense of family relationships. During holiday gatherings, it's not unusual for the business to dominate the gathering.

Whatever your tradition, the holiday season is a wonderful opportunity to set aside the stress and strains of work and celebrate all

the special rituals that bind families together. For me the family is what makes the holidays special. As the family celebrates the holidays, we build the emotional value of family. This not only strengthens our family, but also continues to inspire, strengthen and infuse family value into the company.

The family's values are the core culture of the family's business.



By talking too much about the business during family celebrations you could inadvertently alienate family members not actively involved in the business.

However, by talking too much about the business during family celebrations you could inadvertently alienate family members not actively involved in the business. So, keep normal business discussions in the boardroom and out of the holiday gatherings.

During this holiday season, seek new and innovative ways to celebrate that are inclusive and family oriented. Form a family holiday committee to evaluate if what you are doing to celebrate as family is working. If so, keep it; if not, come up with a new approach. Put the family in charge and keep it there.

Here are some ways to strengthen your holiday celebration:

- ▶ Have realistic expectations
- ▶ Go out of your way to have fun
- ▶ Family icebreakers – discuss in a group: What's your favorite holiday memory? What's the most exciting thing that's

happened this past year?

What is your biggest dream for the New Year?

- ▶ Do a multi-generation family picture
- ▶ Learn about each other's kids – your nieces and nephews
- ▶ Do your best to focus your time and energy on activities that celebrate family tradition and the blessings of the season
- ▶ Do your best to limit business discussions; save them for a regularly scheduled family meeting.

The holiday season provides great opportunity to emphasize those family values that are the bedrock of your family. As you plan family activities understand that less is more. Consider what you can do to create balance, harmony and enjoy the family and life you've created. Happy Holidays. ☺

the contributor

Tom Hubler (hubler@mm.com)

is president of Hubler Family

Business Consultants

(www.hublerfamilybusiness.com)

and an adjunct professor at the

University of St. Thomas.

