While we’ve seen challenges in 2020, which may also be the case in your business, there continue to be bright spots throughout the economy, especially locally that indicate things continue to improve since the onset of the pandemic. There is a lot going on in your business as you adjust to what some may call a sort of “new normal.” It is easy to get caught up in the day to day “whirlwind” of that activity. We thought this month’s article was a good reminder to keep communication open and healthy in any business, especially among family that may be involved. Hopefully these points can be helpful to you as you continue to navigate the business landscape during these uncertain times.

Best Regards,

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Conflict is a normal part of any business, but it’s especially inevitable in a family business. No matter how well you all get along, there will be disagreements from time to time. Sometimes these conflicts are centered around the business while others are ordinary family conflicts that spill over into the daily operations of the farm. There’s no magic formula for banishing conflict from your family farm, but there are things that everyone can do to make it a better work environment for everyone. Here’s some advice on handling conflict in a better, more productive way.

STOP BRINGING BUSINESS HOME
It’s often difficult to stop talking about work when you’re “off the clock,” especially if your coworkers and business partners are your own family members. Whether you’re having dinner with your spouse, grilling out at a family reunion or even opening presents on Christmas, make a conscious effort to stop talking about work. Instead, focus on the moment at hand. Enjoy your family now and save the work conversations for another time.

HOLD REGULAR MEETINGS TO TACKLE ISSUES BIG AND SMALL
All workplaces deal with conflict. But in most businesses, there are practices in place to help solve problems, make decisions and manage conflict constructively. Meetings are a great way to formally address these things. Your family farm may benefit from holding regular meetings to discuss issues in an organized, structured way. Most farms benefit from a structured weekly meeting.

LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER
Listening to each other is the first step in resolving a conflict. Sometimes people think they are listening, but in fact, they aren’t opening their mind or allowing themselves to consider the other person’s viewpoint. You don’t have to give up your position, but you do need to at least consider the possibility that the other person is making a good point. Work to figure out why they feel the way they do and start thinking about how you can come to a resolution.

TALK ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS EARLY ON
If you are frustrated with the way something is being done, it’s best to mention it as soon as possible. That way, you can all work to find a solution before a small issue turns into something much larger. Also, if you’re having an issue with a specific employee or family member, you should address it with them instead of complaining about it to another family member. This may even prevent a conflict entirely.

DON’T TRY TO HANDLE EVERYTHING ON YOUR OWN
Sometimes it is simply impossible to have constructive conversations with family members. The harder you try to resolve something, the worse the conflict gets. That’s why there are some things that are better handled by a professional, such as estate planning and other tasks where emotions can run high. If you are having a serious conflict among family members, it’s an excellent idea to bring in a professional mediator. It may seem drastic, but if it can save your farm and restore your relationship with your family, then it’s worth it. Family-run farms have their challenges, but the end result is worth it. Hopefully, with these conflict resolution tips, you and your family can keep the peace -- both at home, and in the workplace.