

Give Your Kids a Chance to Succeed

By Chris Burand

I overheard a mother angrily arguing with her daughter at the airport a few weeks ago. When I turned to see what was going on, I expected to see a middle-aged mother with her 20 year-old daughter. I was very surprised to see the mother was at least eighty and the daughter at least sixty! I guess it is true that you never stop being a parent, no matter how old you or your children are.

Parents are always parents and most parents never stop worrying about their children. Such worry, though, sometimes robs children of their success and happiness. In agencies, the parent/owner is often so worried about their son or daughter failing, they put their children in a position that definitely prevents total failure, but it prevents success too.

Most often, the son (it's usually a son rather than a daughter) is given a book of business or a management position. If given a book, the book is usually so big, the son never really has to build it to make a good living or he is simply overpaid while he is getting established (and "getting established" often takes a very long time).

The son does not ask for this. Dad (again, it's usually a father) just wants to make sure the son does not fail so he gives the business and the income to his son. The dad never gives his son a chance to fail. For a person to grow and to become someone that can successfully manage an agency, a person absolutely must have the opportunity to fail. By removing this opportunity, dads are robbing their sons of the opportunity to succeed on their own.

The son has to have the opportunity to try selling to learn if he can sell successfully. He has to learn the emotional highs and lows of selling, as well as the technical methods, to build confidence and earn respect. If he fails in sales, then he can learn to do something else productive. Giving the son a book of business and letting the dad and the son pretend he can sell is like a weak acid that slowly eats away confidence and any opportunity for success. It is better to try and to fail, and then to move on to greater success in another capacity than to not fail due to a false environment.

If the son is put in a management role, dads have a habit of not creating measures of success or failure for their sons. Without measures, no one can fail. I have seen many sons put in charge of branch offices and small divisions that really did not need high level management because Dad wanted to make sure his son did not fail. Not failing and succeeding are two different things.

If a father really wants a son to succeed in management, on their own, then the father must create appropriate goals, address required training, and make the son's compensation and continued employment dependent on achieving specific goals. When the son achieves success, the reward will be so much sweeter because he will know he earned his success and the father can be proud for the same reason.

When it comes time to perpetuate the agency, the desire to protect the son from failure is often visible in the terms and the price for which the father sells the agency to his son. Many reasons

may exist for selling the agency to the son for a relatively low price. However, doing so to keep the son from failing is robbing the son of the opportunity to succeed and even robbing him of the motivation to succeed.

If the price is too low, the terms are too easy, or even if the debt is so low the son does not have to grow the agency to survive, how will the son have an opportunity to succeed on his own? Sure, the son is not failing—now. However, if he does not learn early to grow the agency, he will eventually be trampled by his more competitive peers. If the son is going to fail, wouldn't it be better to fail at 30 with fewer financial commitments and time to start over rather than at 50 with kids in college?

Sometimes failure is key to a person's success. Some people need to fail in the agency business so they can go on to succeed in some area that fits their skills and personality better. I have witnessed this hidden blessing many times. If your grown son needs your help to keep from failing and you are personally ensuring he does not fail, maybe you are really preventing him from real success and from finding his real calling.

Sometimes the key for a son to succeed on his own can only occur if the father leaves the agency. Sometimes Dad hangs around because he is a control freak or because he has nothing to do in retirement. Often though, the father hangs around because deep inside, he fears his son cannot succeed on his own. Sometimes this is true and sometimes it is not, but either way, the son, no matter how old he is, often cannot become his own man as long as Dad is around. The parent-child relationship is just too strong. Give your son the opportunity to succeed on his own.

If parents never stop parenting, then parents need to work on their parenting skills, forever. This means helping your kids succeed. It does not mean robbing them of success by preventing them from failing. You likely let them fall down as toddlers. It is okay if they fall down as adults too. They will likely get right back up, just like they did when they were toddlers. Let them succeed by allowing them to fail. Do not rob your kids of their opportunity to succeed on their own.

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December 2008