

Managing management: family business

Family businesses are the backbone of the transport industry.

They bring unique advantages and unique challenges. Nolan's Transport is no different; it's a multi-generational family business mainly operating on Australia's east coast, specialising in refrigerated transport. We spoke with two generations: Daph and her sons Darren and Adrian.

They shared their tips and insights on keeping a family business running across states and generations.



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Work (from the outside in)

While some family members spend their entire working lives inside the family business, the Nolans believe outside experience is invaluable for bringing different ideas.

“It’s always been a family rule that you have to work outside the business before you can work inside the business,” Darren says.

There's another critical benefit to spending some time working outside the family business, according to Adrian:

“It gives you an opportunity to have a look at what else is out there, to find out if it [the family business] is a career path you want to be on.”

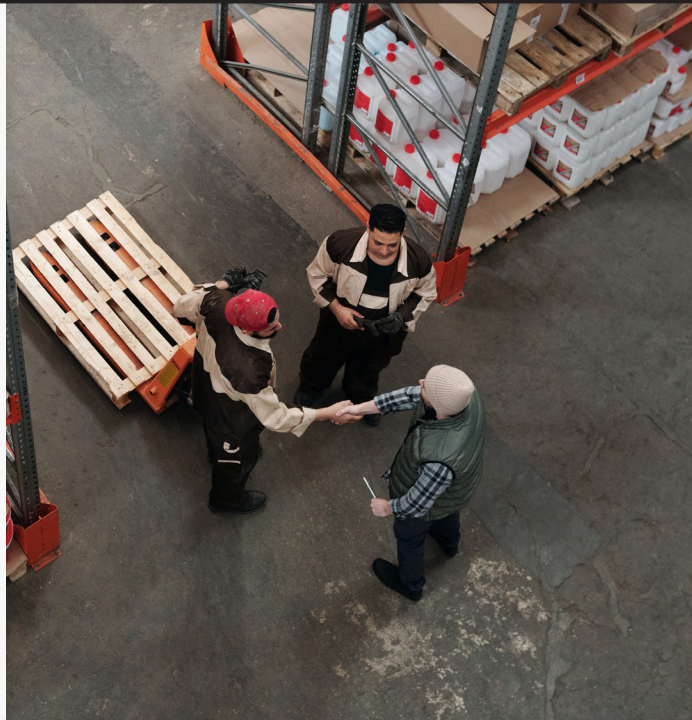
Plan (for continued success)

The company's requirement for family members to work elsewhere so they can decide whether to join the business has other benefits – it helps identify **where they might best contribute** if they choose to join.

“You can’t push your kids to try and make them fit into the slot,” says Darren.

It's worked well for the brothers, as their time outside the business helped them identify their skills and interests. “Darren looks after compliance, and I look after the transport side of things,” says Adrian.

“He runs his team, and I run my team ... we come together to talk about solutions, talk about problems in different areas that we need to address.”



Represent (the business)

To customers, family businesses represent continuity and stability. **Family members can’t do everything**, but you shouldn't shy away from the name.

“Our customers always get a Nolan if they want a Nolan,” Darren says. “So we’re always representing the business.”

It's a similar story internally: to avoid the tensions that can arise, it's essential to show team members that family members are working every bit as hard as they are.

“While we may be directors of the company, we all work in business positions, so we don’t get it too easy. We still have to get in and do stuff,” Darren says.



Trust (your team)

Once a family business gets to a certain size, it'll need to bring in non-family team members, including senior positions. There's a careful balance to be struck between emphasising the family's values and allowing your skilled staff the freedom to do their jobs.

“We have our monthly boardroom meeting with all our managers from different states,” says Adrian.

“We try to spend time with our managers and our staff, so they know that we're not just a corporate person; we're an actual family.”

“You’ve got to put your trust in people. Without that, you can’t do too much else.”



Communicate (clearly and honestly)

Unsurprisingly, underpinning everything is **clear, honest and respectful communication**. It helps avoid family rifts and keeps the rest of the team feeling included and valued.

“Communication’s the most important thing to keep everyone in the loop when you’re doing something,” Daph says. “So there's no animosity amongst the family, that we're all happy with what's happening.”

Darren adds that dealing with conflict constructively is another critical benefit from having good communication:

“There’s always going to be conflict in any family business. We have good dialogues, we sit down and thrash out the pros and cons ... we don’t all have to agree, but I think we have to respect when decisions are made.”

Final thoughts

Darren

“Always arrive early and say hello to people.”

“Arriving on time, doing your job and putting in that bit extra is always appreciated because, let's be honest, things don't always work on an eight to five day.”

Adrian

“The biggest issue is communication. If you get that right, the rest flows on.”

“If someone's got an issue, then bring it up, and we can deal with it straight away ... once you get your relationships going, you don't have any issues at all.”

Daph

“To be successful, you have to have your heart in your business and your business in your heart.”

“You have to show interest; you have to be around your staff, let them see that you're working with them and that you're not just the boss.”

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