

How to Refer Business Owners to a Business Psychologist

A number of professionals like yourself have shared the desirability of occasionally referring business owners (in particular those who own a family business) to a business psychologist, but are unsure of the best way to do so. I've put together a short guide that I think will be of some help.

To review, the positive benefits of family business advising include:

- Creating effective succession strategies
- Improving their profitability and increase the value of their family firms
- Reducing workplace conflict between siblings, parents, and other family members
- Improving morale and productivity in their firm
- Positioning their firm and family for growth or sale (exit strategies)
- Avoiding crippling litigation between family members

Guidelines for referring family business owners to a business psychologist :

1. Find an 'opportune moment'—Business owner may be expressing repetitive concern, problem, frustration, or indicates an openness for help or a fresh perspective. “John, I noticed that you've brought up this problem (tension, concern, complaint) a number of times. Did you know that there are a group of professionals—business psychologists—who specialize in helping family business owners solve these type of problems?”
2. Tell owner about this relatively new specialty. “There are about 1000 practitioners of this new specialty in the US—family business advisors or business psychologists. The field was developed by an MBA professor—Dr. Leon Danco—at Case Western School of Management in the 1960s.”
3. Suggest they interview a business psychologist (often no charge for an initial interview) to explore the usefulness of family business assessment or succession audit. “Smart firms get valuations and audits for their finances, cash flow, inventory, real estate and contracts—why not get a 'relationship/human capital assessment' for your family firm?”
4. Remind the owner that a business psychologist's client is much broader than an individual or pair of people. “Business psychologists assess and advise the whole entity—the family, the business and the relationship between the two. No individual or pair of people are singled out for interventions. “