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Generations in Transition

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Succession is never just paperwork. It's not just signatures, handshakes or a press release. It's personal. It's emotional. And if you've ever been through it, you know it can feel like a tug-of-war where both sides are right and both sides are wrong at the same time.

I know this first-hand. My dad, David, and I had our moments. Some days, we'd have these rare, shining moments where it felt like we were finally getting somewhere, maybe even were on the same page. Other days, you'd swear we were on the edge of nuclear war. But what I've learned through those years is this: Leadership succession is less about control and more about perspective. It's less about who's in charge and more about how two people can look at the exact same thing—a business, a legacy, a greenhouse full of plants—and see two totally different stories.

The truth is, retiring leaders and upcoming leaders rarely look at the process the same way. And that difference—the clash of approaches, attitudes and commitments—defines whether the handoff feels like a blessing or a battlefield.

Let's start with the retiring generation. My dad is the perfect example. For him, the greenhouse business wasn't just a business; it was proof of decades of sweat and hard work. Proof that the late nights, the risks and the sacrifices meant something. Every decision wasn't just about money—it was about protecting a legacy. But mostly about the money.

That's what many retiring leaders carry inside. They've built something plant by plant, day by day. Their perspective is shaped by survival—by the lean years, by the close calls, by the weight of being the one who makes ends meet and doesn't let anyone down.

So, when it comes to succession, their approach can be cautious, even defensive. They want to know: Will this next leader respect what's been built? Will they honor their traditions? Or will they come in with a wrecking ball and undo decades of careful progress?

This is why retiring leaders often focus on control. They set guardrails. They want slow transitions. They cling to certain methods because those methods worked when it mattered most. From their point of view, caution is not

stubbornness; it's protection.

But from the outside, especially from the perspective of the next generation, it can look like hesitation, doubt or even mistrust. And that's where the friction starts.

Now let's flip it. The upcoming generation like me sees things differently. We see outdated systems begging to be replaced, new markets to chase and tech that could make life easier. We see the same greenhouse full of plants, but from another angle. Where the retiring generation sees tradition, we see opportunity. Where they see risk, we see growth. Where they see a need for careful control, we see a need for speed.

Our attitude is shaped by possibility. We've grown up at different points in time. The market is moving faster. Technology is everywhere. The rules of the game shift every year. If you stand still, you fall behind faster than ever.

So our approach to succession leans toward action. We want responsibility sooner. We want freedom to make changes. We want to leave our own mark, not just maintain what was given.

But here's the catch: To the retiring leader, that attitude can feel reckless. It can look like arrogance. It can look like we're tossing aside the foundation they built with blood and grit.

And this is where the gap widens. Because while we think we're showing commitment by pushing for more responsibility, they might see us as being impatient or even disrespectful. Both sides want what's best, but our definitions of "best" are totally out of sync.

Succession isn't just strategy. It's raw emotion. It's a father/mother watching a son/daughter take over. It's a founder watching someone else take control of their business. It's years of unspoken expectations crashing into years of untested ambition.

That's why it can feel so explosive. My dad and I lived that. Some days it felt like we were moving in sync; other days, we'd leave the office with jaws clenched, each convinced the other just didn't get it.

And here's the truth: We were both right.

He was right to want to protect what he built. I was right to want to push it forward. But the process wasn't about proving who was smarter—it was about learning how to carry both truths at once.

That's the hidden tension of succession. It's not really about the business—it's about identity, respect and trust. It's about a retiring leader learning how to let go and an upcoming leader learning how to take hold without breaking what's not broken.

So how do you move through it without burning the whole thing down?

The first step is honesty. Both sides must admit what they're afraid of. The retiring leader has to say, "I'm scared you'll forget what it took to get here." The upcoming leader has to say, "I'm scared you'll never fully let me lead." Saying it out loud breaks the silence that often poisons the process.

The second step is clarity. A successful succession cannot be done on vague promises. Years of hearing

“someday this will be yours” without a clear timeline can erode trust and motivation. Roles and responsibilities must be spelled out. Who decides what? When does authority shift? What’s the process for making changes? Without clarity, every small decision becomes a battle.

The third step is respect. This one sounds simple, but it’s the hardest. Respect means giving weight to the other perspective, even when you don’t agree. It means remembering that the business is bigger than one person’s pride.

My dad and I didn’t always follow these steps. In fact, many times we ignored them completely. But I carry them now, hoping they’ll guide me when the day comes to hand things down to the next generation.

Succession will never be easy—it’s too personal, too layered, too full of history. But it doesn’t have to end in bitterness. It can end in gratitude. It can end in growth. At the heart of all this is one word: commitment.

For the retiring leader, commitment means seeing the process through, even when it hurts to step back. It means trusting that the legacy won’t die just because new hands are steering the business.

For the upcoming leader, commitment means sticking with the process even when it feels slow, even when your vision is burning to break free. It means proving not just that you can dream big, but that you can carry the weight day after day.

Both sides must prove they’re committed—not just to the business, but to each other. Because without that, succession becomes a battlefield of egos instead of a passage of stewardship. **GT**

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