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## Being Smart in the Family Business: Emotional Intelligence

By [Lance Woodbury](#)

Family businesses can be full of drama. The history you have with your parents, children or siblings, your expectations of their behavior, and your ongoing communication patterns as a family combine to create an emotional minefield. Understanding your emotions, and the emotions of others, helps you be a more effective family business participant. “Emotional intelligence” is a catch-all phrase that refers to this awareness of emotions and your skill in directing your behavior toward a positive outcome.

In her recent book *Insight*, Tasha Eurich suggests that people who “have a clear understanding of themselves enjoy more successful careers and better lives,” and she offers several tips for improving such awareness. Another helpful (and short!) book is *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, by Travis Bradberry and others, in which the authors offer practical tips on identifying and managing emotions. Here are four points to consider when improving your emotional intelligence:

1. **Acknowledge when you are in the process of becoming frustrated or angry.** The pause required to admit these negative feelings offers a short break in which you might choose a difference response.
2. **Pause your immediate need to respond a certain way (i.e. blow up, be sarcastic, etc.) and consider other strategies.** There are likely other ways to approach the situation.
3. **Accurately assess other people’s emotions.** If you can recognize their sentiments, you can show that you understand how they feel. You don’t need to *agree*; you need to *understand*.
4. **Use your understanding of their emotions to connect with other people.** Your ability to make a connection with people enhances your impact and the potential for more positive outcomes. Try naming their emotional state.

While we all have difficult experiences with other people, recognizing our emotions and skillfully guiding our responses can make a big difference in family business success.

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## Emotions at Work

By [Davon Cook](#)

During our work, we witness many emotional interactions. Let me describe the when, how, and why of these interactions.

**When?** In family meetings discussing history and values of prior generations; in tough sessions managing conflict; in planning sessions expressing hopes for the future; in one-on-one conversations when a family member needs to vent in a safe space...to name just a few.

**How?** I’ve seen emotion expressed via crying, yelling, shutting down, having difficulty communicating what one intends, all sorts of body language, cursing, name calling, sarcastic language, anxious worrying, and numerous other ways.

**Why?** This is the most important question. Expressing emotion is not necessarily something to avoid entirely. It’s usually *a sign that one cares deeply about the topic or people at hand*. “Getting all emotional” (as I’ve heard it called in several families) makes some folks quite uncomfortable. They hunker down in their chairs and hope it ends soon. I try to acknowledge the emotion rather than ignore it—acknowledge



it as a sign of investment in the situation. Others react with a counter emotion, which can escalate the situation, especially in conflict. Whether your reaction is avoidance or counter emotion, see if viewing it through the lens of the other person's level of caring changes your reaction a bit.

Notice I said that expressing emotion is “not necessarily” something to be avoided. Certainly, extreme behaviors on a regular basis can be counterproductive. Frequent yelling outbreaks or cursing tends to shut down the productivity of an interaction! Emotional intelligence as Lance discussed is an important skill to hone.

So, what can you do if your emotions, or your reaction to *other's* outbreaks, are hindering your ability to make progress? Three suggestions. As I have observed other families' emotional reactions, and participated in my own, perhaps the most valuable lesson is to *ride the wave*, meaning to let the wave of immediate, visceral reaction pass before you react visibly or verbally. Just learning to outlast that immediate gut-clenching reaction is a huge first step. Then take a moment to *observe* why the emotion is present and try to *value* the caring and commitment expressed through the emotion.

If you're involved in a family business, it's likely strong emotions from *someone* are part of the deal. You *can* impact how you share, receive, and react to those emotions.

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## How to Be “Cool”—Biblically Speaking

By [Dr. Bill Long](#)

“The one who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,  
and the one who rules the spirit (is better) than the conqueror of a city,” Prov. 16:32.

“The one who restrains words has knowledge,  
and the one who has a cool spirit is a person of understanding,” Prov. 17:27.

The Book of Proverbs gives what might be called “counterintuitive wisdom.” We think certain things are true in life but then we read Proverbs, and we are often told the opposite. These two Proverbs present counterintuitive wisdom with respect to the emotions. Their major point is that the more powerful person in life is one who is both slow and cool, rather than fast and hot. Our culture, increasingly, favors people who are quick-acting and decisive, eager to pursue hot deals rapidly.

But let's listen to these words from Proverbs. The thoughts are both expressed in a form of poetry called “parallelism”—the second line of the Proverb gives a parallel thought to the first, though varying the words. Thus, “slow to anger”=“ruling the spirit” and “restraining words” = “cool in spirit.” The one in Scripture who is first said to be “slow in anger” is God Himself, in Exodus 34:6. Thus, what Proverbs is really teaching in these words is behavior imitating God.

What is that behavior? To realize, first of all, that slow is better than fast, and that an ability to calm the roiling waters of the emotions is better than putting down a rebellion in a far-off city. We are confronted with situations nearly every day where the “temperature” of our spirit may rise. Imitating the Divine patience towards us with some patience of our own is paramount. Then, second, we realize that a cool, rather than hot, spirit is better. We attain that through restraint of words. We spend most of our life thinking about what we *should* have said; we rarely say to ourselves, “I should have kept my mouth shut.” But the key to Biblical coolness is restraint, in words and emotions. That is the heart of Proverbs.

