



People Solutions

When Family and Business Meet

5/9/08

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An Inspiring Family Business

Sometimes when we write a feature newsletter on folks, I send out questions they can answer and send back responses at their convenience. Once I get their feedback, we then do what we can to fit the answers into the theme and direction we intended for the newsletter. In this particular feature you will read below, I wasn't surprised by the thoughtful responses but I was thrilled all the same.

Everything I had already learned about this unique family business called Sunshine Grounds Care was special. Several months ago when Peter van Stralen contacted us to

learn more about the Working Smarter Training Challenge, I went on their website to learn more about Sunshine Grounds. When I came to the home page I thought I was seeing things ... 10 Brothers standing in their bright yellow company shirts with smiles on each face as radiant as the one next to him. A few weeks later when Jim went to Caledon, Ontario, for a Working Smarter Day to kick off their 52- week Lean journey with all of their 18 franchise companies, he came back enthralled and could not stop talking about the van Stralens. "This company just does it right, Beth, and we have to tell our newsletter readers about them." He said "They get along amazingly well--10 brothers working together to support a 20+ million dollar business...."

So I sent out the questions and wondered how I would tell their story ... Once again we were amazed ... Talk about over achievers! I could try to turn Peter's thoughts and those from the founding brother Tim into a story in our normal format. I hope you don't mind, however, if this week I just let you read what they had to say. I can say that every time I read their answers, I become even more inspired by the van Stralens and what they have shared with all of us about their unique family business. Please sit back and ponder what we all can learn from this great family. We don't have to be running a family business to apply the guiding principles they share to our own successful practices. I am sure there are lessons here for every business person, parent, and leader reading it. Their candid answers reflect basic wisdom and experience that we can apply to all areas of our lives.

- **BETH PALUCH**



The 10 van Stralen Brothers in 2007

10 Brothers Continue SUNSHINE Success

Questions to Tim and Peter van Stralen about their family business ...

1. What is the secret to Sunshine Grounds' success?

Sunshine Grounds Care has been successful so far because of a number of reasons ...



Tim, Peter, Derek (working together in the great outdoors)

Just Beginning - 1988

Peter: I'm sure if you ask any of my brothers, they would say the answer to that question is "our upbringing." Tim was 19 when he started the company, but by then my parents had already laid the foundation for success. They taught us not to be afraid of good old-fashioned work. They taught us that you need to contribute and do your part to be part of the family. "Pay your way"--nothing comes for free.

Tim and I each wanted a horse so bad when we were 15 and 16. We took a job painting fence posts at a horse farm all summer to earn the money to buy the horses. "Man did we feel good when we finally got them." I still have mine 23 years later, and I still can't stand the smell of paint. They taught us, "You will realize your dreams if you have a clear vision, and work hard to get it." They also taught us from an early age that "if you only think about yourself, you will end up by yourself."

Tim: The secret to our success starts simply with an uncompromised commitment to customer satisfaction. Taking care of the customer and leaving every customer a happy customer comes before all else including, making money. As a rule, the money will follow, when you follow this religiously.

Secondly, our family has been a strong engine that has propelled and driven our company's success: ten brothers all working together towards the same

common goal with the same obsession with customer satisfaction. This could possibly be achieved with 10 non-family members, but it would be difficult to get the same level of respect, effort and sacrifice for the common good that we achieve as family members.

Our situation is very unique because we are 10 brothers working in the same company. The challenge is to identify common goals within the company that will help each one achieve his personal goals.

Each one has their own character, personality and skills. One may be exceptionally good with sales, one with customers, one with employees, one with design, one with technology, etc. Each could learn from the others to produce multi-faceted skills that all contributed to the experience of the customer and to the development of the Sunshine Brand.



Tim van Stralen

Because of this joint effort, our growth has been astounding. Because of this, the company has presented itself as a great opportunity or a best option for achieving one's personal goals.

Peter: We had a vision of what we wanted our company to act, feel and look like right from the beginning, and we kept that vision in front of us every day. We began with a mission of caring. We were providing grounds care services, but our real product was CARE. Before everything we do we ask ourselves, "Will it show that we CARE?" We care about our customers, we care about how their properties look, we care about the machinery we are operating, and we care about our fellow employees. It makes for a fun place to work.

2. How do you get 10 brothers to work together and make it work successfully and what advice would you give others involved in family businesses?



Peter van Stralen

Peter: Run it like any business. Develop clear job descriptions and job contracts. Sign them. Develop concise operating procedures and systems for everything you do. That way if something isn't working, you can work together to fix the system or process, rather than placing blame on the person. It makes for a blameless corporate society and eliminates stress and tension between people. Never interfere in each other's private family life.

Tim: As we all know, there are challenges to personal or business relationships. As you can imagine, these could be multiplied with 10 brothers working together. For us to make it work, it comes down to practicing the basic Christian values of respect and resisting the basic human tendency towards greed and self-seeking. Practicing these things allows us to have a genuine desire to see not only ourselves but every member of the group succeed as well.

Of course, without strong personal goals and a good reward, the effort would not be there, as every good capitalist knows. This drive for personal wealth and especially a good future for our families is very, very strong in our organization. However, we see the success of our company and our family as the means to achieving those goals. Therefore, we are willing to help each other and sacrifice a little of our time and money to help the business and family grow and stay healthy. Another very important aspect is to keep those goals clear, defined and visible. As the founder and overseer of the collective operations, it is my job to constantly make sure all efforts are going toward achieving those goals, identifying where that objective is lacking, and refocusing the efforts back in the right direction. We conduct annual meetings where these goals are discussed, both personal and corporate. These discussions are always exciting and productive as the goals are redefined. We identify the ones we have reached and set new goals. This is very rewarding, exciting and a necessary practice. We have a system that handsomely rewards personal efforts for achieving measurable goals. This is a great incentive to do your part.

Peter: We realized a long time ago that "together each achieves more" TEAM. No one person can build this company; it is a TEAM effort. We support each other, encourage each other, and draw off the energy that comes from the group. We respect each other's valuable input and effort, even though they may be completely different.

3. How would you describe your process for communication?

Peter: It's our parents that taught us to communicate. That was a big part of our household growing up. We always ate dinner together around the BIG oak dinner table, and we talked about everything that happened at school that day. It was noisy and fun. If someone wasn't speaking for whatever reason, or holding something inside, Mom and Dad had a way of drawing it out of us. "You always feel so much better when you talk about it." Everybody left the table with a smile. We kept that going all through youth and then into the business. With our own households now, we don't get together as often; we do conference calls and board meetings, but the principle is the same. All major shareholder meetings (with the brothers) are conducted at our parents' house. It's still noisy and still a lot of fun!

Tim: Communication is very important in a family as well as a business. To keep our communication open, we conduct weekly 2-hour meetings in person, or online where each brother participates and presents a preset report so all brothers can be up to date on what is going on and can be assured that each one is doing his part. All have the opportunity to comment, critique, and speak openly. This prevents any room for discontent or hard feelings. These meetings also produce a lot of good ideas and suggestions to help each one in his efforts.

4. What are your family gatherings like? Do you talk business or is that taboo?

Peter: We talk business casually while playing with the kids or flipping burgers on the BBQ, but we don't make it the center of conversation. Our kids and wives have great attitudes, and support us as well. We are very lucky that way. We learned over the past 20 years to balance family and business by aligning the two. Our business goals are in alignment with our personal goals.

Six brothers are married so far, some for 10 years, some just married. But the motto "all for one and one for all" still applies and still works. Our wives are good friends with each other. We see their role managing the home side just as important as what we do. They are a huge part of our success.



The van Stralen Parents
Frederik and Nellie van Stralen

Tim: During family gatherings we have an unwritten rule to exclude business discussions from the subject matter. Invariably the topic tends to wander in that direction and gets started. It only takes the "look" from the wives to take care of that.

Our families are a big part of our lives. It could be said that we do what we do for our families. Therefore, we are careful not to let the business overpower this more important aspect of our lives.



The 10 van Stralen Brothers in 1999

5. What is the biggest challenge for you and your brothers in this work relationship?

Peter: Getting together as often as we would like to has become one of the biggest challenges these days. With travel, busy schedules and our own families, we don't get all the brothers in the same room too often. We have learned to use technology to overcome this problem. With scheduled conference calls, and web-based tools, we can actually collaborate on projects together quite efficiently.

6. How do the principles that make your unique family business translate into the development of your franchise family?

Peter: I think what we learned working together as brothers is our biggest asset now in franchising. Franchising is a unique business relationship in itself. You have the franchisor with goals and the franchisee with their own goals. Just like a family business. We all are able to meet our goals through what we call "BOSS."



A Franchise Group

B = the BRAND (We built our Brand through dedication, hard work, integrity, quality and most of all Caring)

O S = the Operating System (Clearly documented in our Operations Manual, we call it our road map to success)

S = Support (From Head office, we provide support for our franchise family, and together we all support each other.)

By nature, we seem to be programmed to look out only

for ourselves, but we have developed a corporate culture around TEAM work, which carries through the franchise family. We have an "Ideas" forum set-up where we all can share ideas and best practices; we learn a lot from each other.

Tim: We invite all and anyone to ask our franchisees about their experience with the "sunshine" family since they joined. We believe we are basing our relationships with our franchisees on the same basis as we have with our brothers. This "way of being" is catchy. We see the same "all for one, one for all" attitude being perpetuated between individual franchises. It is a great recipe for success.

7. Is there anything that you would like to give as a personal perspective on why you chose to be part of the family business?

Peter: Years ago when the company was smaller, some of the brothers were in unrelated businesses of their own. It wasn't long before the strength in numbers, and the idea of being part of a family business attracted all the brothers and they could bring the skills they had developed to Sunshine. First 5 brothers and then 10 strong, we were a force to be reckoned with. I am thankful I was given the opportunity to work with my brothers. There is strength in numbers. You can accomplish a lot especially when everyone is working in unison towards a common goal. I guess that would be the same for any company, not just a family business.

8. How do you see the Working Smarter Training Challenge as a complement to all the things you are already doing right at Sunshine?

Peter: Now that we are running out of multiple franchise locations, centralized training became impossible. The WSTC has allowed us to train the same program at the same time at all locations. I went to a Jim Paluch event at Landscape Ontario last year with 11 people from our company. The program struck a chord with all of us. We realized the value in engaging everyone in the company in "Working Smarter." We are just a few weeks into the program and we are already seeing results. We have a 500-page operations manual, full of the systems that make a "Sunshine" business successful, but this program allows us to constantly review each system and look for ways to do it the "least waste way."



Tim: We are excited by the "Working Smarter Challenge" because we have seen the value of this type of forum with the success of our company. We want to have this same practice, company wide as the growth goes way beyond the immediate family. It is so easy to say we are "too busy" to conduct these meetings, but without them your business will go off track and lose steam pretty quickly. It would be like saying we are "too busy" to put fuel in our trucks. "Working Smarter" provides a framework for these discussions and mandates the weekly meetings for our companies so we "take the time" for this important ingredient for success. Working Smarter fits in with our company culture like a glove.

Quotes

"A man should never neglect his family for business."

- Walt Disney

"I'm serious when I do my work. I'm not serious when I'm home with my kids."

- Bill Gates

"It's all about quality of life and finding a happy balance between work and friends and family."

- Philip Green

"As I look back now on my coaching career, I think of my family, I think of the days that we spent together. I say this to coaches everywhere: If you ever have a chance to take your kids with you, take them. Don't miss that opportunity. Because when it's all over and done with, when you look back, those are going to be your fondest memories."

- John Madden

"At home we have always regarded the dining table as the prime seat of learning. We planned it so it was impossible to see or hear a TV from the table, and it has paid dividends in the volume of ideas that have been shared over the evening meal."

- Noel Whittaker

"Perhaps the greatest social service that can be rendered by anybody to this country and to mankind is to bring up a family."

- George Bernard Shaw

"Govern a family as you would cook a small fish - very gently."

- Chinese Proverb

***Working Smarter
Training Challenge***



Do you have a strategy to WORK SMARTER?

TAKE THE CHALLENGE NOW!

CALL (877) JPH JAMS (574-5267).

www.jphorizons.com

CLOSING THOUGHTS

"Go forth and multiply." That is what came out of my mouth at the end of the workshop for Sunshine Grounds a few months ago. I had said that before at the end of a talk and would get a chuckle or two. The same thing happened here with a few chuckles and laughs and then everyone headed for the doors or to find a conversation. As I was putting some of my things away and packing up, a sophisticated gentleman came up to the front of the room accompanied by Peter van Stralen. "This is my dad," he said with the same pride as a first grader might have introducing his father to the teacher. I couldn't help but think that this was a special man, raising the quality of family that he and his wife had. Shaking hands, he said with a smile and then a hearty laugh, "You know, on my wedding day I took that 'go forth and multiply' thing seriously. My wife and I have a total of 15 children." He said this with the same pride that I saw in Peter's eyes. It was clear to me that he had. Not only in bringing 15 outstanding people into this world, but the thousands of lives those 15 children could possibly touch over a lifetime is multiplying in the grandest way. As we raise our families or run our businesses, the core values that we demonstrate, live and instill will make a difference for many years to come. Let's all

go forth and multiply as much positive and good in the world as we can.

- Jim Paluch

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