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Educator: Tools needed to manage family business not taught in business schools

By Dan McCue , Daily Journal Staff

It's not difficult to imagine Joseph Astrachan walking a figurative tight rope as he addresses the owners and managers of family-run businesses at one of his frequent seminars.

But in his 25 years of mining the often personal underpinnings of family business conflict, the Wachovia Eminent Scholar Chair of Family Business at Georgia's Kennesaw State University has never had anyone walk out of a session.

"I think there are probably a couple of reasons for that," Astrachan said. "One, of course, is that people are always interested in other people's problems. But beyond that, I think family business owners recognize the commonality of the issues that arise and are grateful to get someone else's perspective on how to resolve them.

"There's a reason business schools don't delve deeply into the myriad of issues that might arise in a family business, and that reason is that there are just so many moving parts, many of which aren't recognized in the day-to-day of running a commercial enterprise," he added.

Astrachan, director of the [Cox Family Enterprise Center](#) at Kennesaw State and an internationally acknowledged expert in family business issues, will be the guest speaker at the next family business forum hosted by the [Tate Center for Entrepreneurship](#).

The forum, which will cover a wide range of family business issues, is scheduled for Oct. 11 at 4 p.m. A reception, hosted by the [College of Charleston](#), will follow the event.

Despite the fact most businesses in the world are family enterprises, and therefore, almost all of workers are employed by one, Astrachan said he believes most people fail to recognize the shadow family relationships cast over their daily working experience.

When family members involved in the ownership or management of a business fail to acknowledge this, the survival of the business could be at stake, Astrachan said.

"I think one of the interesting phenomena in American society is our overwhelming belief that family relations should be natural, that they are somehow innate and that in a family the way you act is naturally based upon what you feel," he said.

"I argue that family relations are not truly or entirely the result of biological determination and that we have to be conscious of what's going on in those relationships and deliberately act to

foster them ,” A strachan explained . “If we don’t, then problems can arise and manifest themselves even within the structure of the business.”

The Tate Center session, the third in an ongoing series, is expected to be one part lecture and one part free-flowing discussion. The one ground rule is that anything said about the inner workings of someone’s business or family does not leave the room .

“Most of the give and take is anecdotal, and a lot of it is hypothetical, but I think one thing that characterizes all of these sessions is that the family issues almost always remain under the surface in the early going ,” A strachan said .

That means the moderator has to make a fateful decision: whether to try to get at the deeper issues slowly or to go right after them , in A strachan’s words, “like ripping off a Band-Aid .”

“The key to doing that is getting them to understand that these underlying family issues may make them feel awful, but they’re not fatal,” he continued . “The key to addressing these situations is getting them to be willing to make things happen. In this country, there is a strange belief that you can’t do things to better your family or your family business, but that’s just not the case .”

Tickets are \$25 per person and advance registration is encouraged. A \$10 discount is available for FastTrac, Center for Women, Mount Pleasant Business and Professional Association and Women@Work members. To register, contact Lisa O’Beirne at (843) 953-6622 or obeirnel@cofc.edu.