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All in the family

Many state firms run by father, child

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For a kid, a day at work with Dad usually involves a tour of an office or warehouse, and gets no more exciting than when the child gets to play with a "received" stamp and inkpad.

But for Max Schumacher's boys, a day at work often meant they got to see future athletes in some unlikely moments: 2-year-old Ken Griffey Jr. running around a baseball stadium with his mother hot on his heels, or a college-aged Moises Alou hanging out with his dad, now manager of the San Francisco Giants.

That's what Bruce and Mark Schumacher saw as kids when they tagged along to work with their dad, Max Schumacher, president and chairman of the Indianapolis Indians baseball team.

And both sons liked their dad's workplace so much they now work full time in the organization. Bruce, 46, is director of corporate development. Mark, 34, is director of merchandising.

With Father's Day Sunday, many grown children around the country will call or visit their dads -- perhaps the only time they'll talk to him for months.

The Schumachers usually spend at least 40 hours a week together -- often much longer. They don't need to set aside a special day to reconnect.

And that's just fine with Dad.

"When I look back at starting to work for the Indians, baseball was the sport that I loved," Max Schumacher said, "but then to have two of your sons here working with you every day is just an added enjoyment."

Around Indiana and the country, there are many families like the Schumachers, in which grown children work with their fathers.

Ninety percent of employers in Indiana are family businesses, said Joseph Astrachan, director of the Cox Family Enterprise Center at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Ga. Seventy-five percent of those are businesses run by the father and a child, he said.

Many times, children look up to their father's work because it is both a source of income and a source of pride. And many follow in their dad's footsteps as adults, joining the family business.

"There's excitement and enthusiasm of perpetuating the family legacy," said Wayne Rivers, president of the Family Business Institute, based in North Carolina.

Gene Sease, 74, and his son David Sease, 50, know about the excitement of working with family. They have worked together since 1986, when they bought a public relations firm with another partner, Lou Gerig. The three run the business, Sease, Gerig &

Associates, which now deals with management, communications and public relations.

"In any good father-son relationship, the father is also a mentor, somebody who you can look up to and somebody who is a friend," David Sease said.

"For me, what better way to have him as a father as a role model and now to have him as a business associate as my role model? That's the best of all possible worlds," he added.

All three are partners in the firm. But David Sease said he looks to his father as the leader.

"There's not a day that goes by that I don't also realize that he is my father," he said. "And being my father is far more important than being my business partner."

Is that right, Dad?

"We haven't had that first disagreement," Gene Sease said.

Avoiding disagreements is not always easy for family businesses, Rivers said.

Many times there are trust issues between fathers and their children, because fathers know their children too well, he said. They have lived through all the mistakes their children have made, and most of the time, helped them deal with those mistakes.

Nikki Boram, who works for her dad's landscaping company in Noblesville, said that she is always aware of how she may be perceived by her father, Lynn Boram.

"It's not necessarily that he doesn't trust me," she said. "But it's me being afraid of being a disappointment. I feel like a teenager sometimes still."

Boram said she always wanted to work for her dad, and three years ago she joined the 20- person business, Boram Lawn and Landscape, and currently does design for the company.

Lynn Boram is semi-retired, and as he transfers the business to his daughter, she wonders if there might be some family tension. The question of succession usually brings stress to any family business, because the child wants more responsibility and the parent sees that as the child pushing the parent out, Rivers said.

David Sease does not see that as an issue, because he said he wants his father to stay with the business as long as he can.

Bruce Schumacher doesn't face the same succession issues, because his father does not own the Indians. He and his brother both see long futures with the Indians, although, Bruce said, maybe not as long as his dad.

Max Schumacher, 73, is in his 50th season working for the Indians, moving his way up from ticket manager to general manager, to president and finally adding on the chairman position after the 1997 season.

"To completely follow in his footsteps you have to realize that he's 73 years old," Bruce Schumacher said. "I would be surprised if I do it for as long as him, but I expect to do it for a lot of years to come."