

The Miami Herald

FATHERS

Following dad's path into work

June 15, 2008

BY CINDY KRISCHER GOODMAN

cgoodman@MiamiHerald.com

MIAMI HERALD FILE

Michael Montel, left, and Max Montel, right, are father and son. Both are theater directors.

A new Monster Intelligence Father's Day survey shows more than half of working fathers feel their employers should treat dads better than they do now. That may be why, in these uncertain economic times, fewer dads are encouraging their offspring to follow the same career paths.



Max Montel, 29, recalls deciding when he was only six years old to pursue his father's profession as a theater director. His father, Michael, says he didn't encourage or discourage his son; he only made him aware of the unstable nature of the profession. Yet, he was thrilled with his son's decision to become a director. "He knew it could be all consuming and he still had a love for it," Michael says.

This summer the two both are working as directors of short plays that make up the Summer Shorts Festival running through June 22 in South Florida. It's their second time working together.

"The relationship between fathers and sons in business is a complex one to be sure," says Jeff Faulkner, partner in The Rawls Group, an Orlando succession-planning firm.

The relationship gets particularly fragile when dealing with family businesses. Cox Family Enterprise Center estimates there are at least 2 million father-son businesses in the United States.

Sons tend to have a big desire to join dad's business and a deep sense of entitlement to take over, Faulkner says. But fathers tend to be reluctant to cede control, especially when they are financially dependent on the ongoing business. The larger the business, the more likely fathers are to encourage sons to join, according to Joseph Astrachan, director of the Cox Family Enterprise Center.

Surveys indicate that only a third of family businesses survive a second generation.

"More often the desire for the business is really a desire for the father's attention," Faulkner says.

Faulkner says what makes for a successful father-son business relationship is "a lot of hard work on the relationship, understanding each other, and putting responsibilities in writing."

For Max, sharing a career with his dad has been a way to connect: "We always have had something to talk about that doesn't have emotional heat to it."

Film director George Lucas, creator of *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* has said he would be an office-supply salesman if he had listened to his father and gone into the family business. The father-son tension is a subtext of both of his most famous movies.

Lucas says he came to understand his father and why he pressured him to go into the family business.

"That was his life," Lucas says. "He worked very hard at it.

"He started out as an errand boy, and he ended up owning the company, and it was a big deal to him."