

Robert Waldl

Understanding Families in Family Businesses

- Interdisciplinarity between Consulting, Coaching and Counseling

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Counseling individuals, couples or families, who run family businesses, allows us a unique insight into the interactions between personal and professional relationships, between love and work, and emotions and business. Such complex counselling challenges require a multi-professional, interdisciplinary approach. We cannot think in categories such as relationship only, we also need to consider concepts such as roles and systems. The counsellor must actively and constructively deal with the themes of power, hierarchies and organization.

Families who run businesses live and work within a complex interaction between the two social systems of the business- and the private world. Every day they must balance contradictory value systems in decision-making, communication and loyalties.

There are many reasons why business families approach a counsellor/coach/consultant. Mostly they are having problems coping with workloads and are unsure whether their problems arise from their partnership, their family or their business. Incongruence and feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty regarding double roles exist while communication becomes ambiguous and those involved feel threatened by each other. When companies are handed onto the next generation, ensuing issues often endanger both relationships and the business itself.

A person-centred approach in understanding the situation helps at individual-, interactive and organizational levels. Encouraging clients to increase both their self-awareness and their awareness of others, as well as improving communication in double role situations, increases congruency. Clients are

then able to move freely between their roles as family members and company functionaries. This opens up new perspectives within the family and the business organization.

While the work with family-run businesses demands an interdisciplinary approach, clarity regarding the roles within the supporting system itself is also necessary. In this presentation cases will also be described showing how clarity in tasks and roles can be achieved in a family-run business through the application of different disciplines.

Robert Waldl, M.A., Ph.D., is a person-centred psychotherapist and trainer in psychotherapy at the Forum in Austria.

He works as a coach and management consultant in Vienna and has been certified as a Business Succession Consultant by the Austrian Chamber of Commerce. A focal point of his work is counselling individuals, couples and families who run family businesses, especially those in the process of handing the company over to the next generation.

Address: Schottenfeldgasse 41/20, 1070 Vienna, Austria

E-mail: office@waldl.com, phone: +43 664 233 27 49

www.waldl.com

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