

CASE STUDY

Transition turmoil: Alleviating staff concerns makes a family-owned business ready to begin a succession process

SITUATION

A family-owned West Michigan professional services firm, built from scratch by the founding father, was looking to prepare and transition the son to take over the father's role as leader of the firm. The father has a strong personality and style of running his business that was both appreciated and respected by the staff. The firm had grown handsomely under his leadership. The son was dramatically different than his father in terms of cognitive style. The father recognized that his son had gifts and talents that he himself did not possess. He had confidence that the son could take the business to new heights. While the father recognized his son's leadership potential, the staff had some doubts that someone who was wired so differently from the father could effectively run the business. This attitude was impeding the transition of leadership in the firm. As a result, the father and son asked Pondera to work with the entire team to help manage attitudes and relationships amongst the staff to help assure the successful transitioning of the business from father to son.

OUR FACILITATION

Pondera began by administering the Pondera® Virtual Advisor (PVA) to both the father and son and then spent time listening to what their notions and visions were for the transition, what they thought the future of the business might be, as well as what they saw as challenges in the relationships between themselves and their staff. Once Pondera was clear about the father and son's thoughts and the challenges they were facing, we facilitated a kick-off meeting to acquaint the staff with the process and to help allay any fears about the intentions of the process. After the kick-off meeting, each member of the staff completed the PVA and several Stakeholder Value Exchanges took place. Those exchanges helped to open up a dialogue between the staff members, the father, and the son in order to address some of the key tensions that they were facing. In addition, each staff member took a Team Assessment survey, which was then discussed in depth in a Team Session and which helped to uncover more of the key tensions and concerns that the staff and the leadership of the firm were facing.

OUTCOME

Each individual learned about and better understood themselves, their co-workers, and the leadership of the firm in terms of cognitive variety. The staff members came to the realization that there are no good or bad people, just people with differences. They learned that leadership comes in many forms and that there is no right or wrong leadership style. One of the keys to success for them was to learn how to embrace each other's differences and to work more effectively as a team. As a result of the process and Pondera's facilitation, the staff grew to have a greater appreciation and respect for the son's special gifts and different leadership style. In addition, the staff finally came to the understanding that the impending transition would not be an event, but rather a process and a journey. The change would occur over a period of time and the father would still continue to be involved in the business. Lastly, Pondera helped the staff understand the unique burden that entrepreneurs and business leaders face in regards to the pressures and challenges of building their business.