

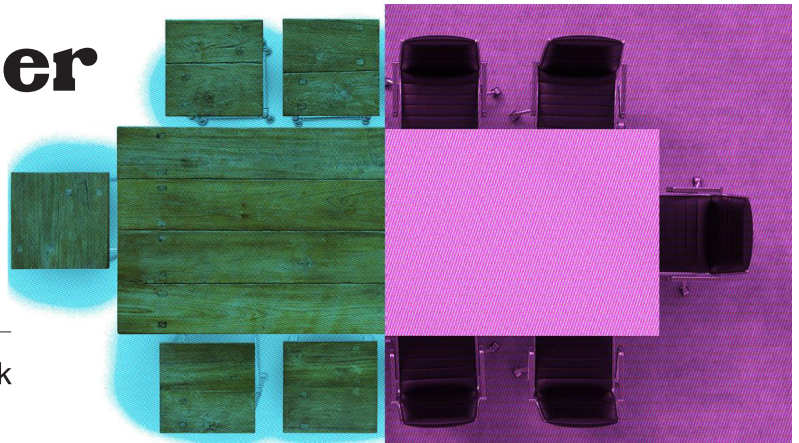
COMSTOCK'S

BUSINESS FOR THE CAPITAL REGION

From the Dinner Table to the Board Room

How three local family businesses make it work

By Tania Fowler | SEPTEMBER 30, 2015



Some families love being together, some enjoy short visits and others have a hard time just getting through Thanksgiving dinner. So how do families who have decided to go into business together make it work? Recently I had sat down with three families-turned-business-partners to find out.

Don't try to do it all. Do play to one another's strengths.

Doug and Pam Lipp, who together run international consulting practice Doug Lipp and Associates, met in 1983 while working at Disneyland. Pam worked in marketing, and Doug ran the employee training team and was later a key player on the opening team for Tokyo Disneyland. The theme for the Lipp's business model was forged at Disney, where years ago Walt Disney stressed the need for a balance of dreamers and doers.

"We have kind of a living lab of that in our own business," Pam says. "Doug is definitely more of the dreamer and creator of products and I am definitely behind the scenes, the doer. We are both really comfortable in those roles."

Don't forget about non-family team members. Do build a community that involves all of your employees

The Lipps: Quack-Off Origin Story

IN 1983, PAM LIPP'S FIRST JOB AT DISNEY WAS TO PLAN DONALD DUCK'S 50TH BIRTHDAY PARTY. SHE DECIDED A "QUACK-OFF" WOULD BE FUN FOR CLARENCE NASH, THE 50-YEAR VOICE OF DONALD DUCK, WHO WOULD BE IN ATTENDANCE. AT A MEETING SHE ASKED IF ANYONE KNEW PEOPLE WHO QUACKED. DOUG LIPP SHEEPISHLY OFFERED, "I CAN QUACK." "YOU'RE IN!" PAM ANSWERED. IN FRONT OF THREE JUDGES, DOUG WOWED AND WON. THE PAIR WAS MARRIED NINE MONTHS LATER, 30 YEARS AGO. THE CONTEST'S RUNNER-UP HAS BEEN THE VOICE OF DONALD DUCK SINCE. DOUG JOKES, "HE GOT THE JOB BUT I GOT THE GIRL."

Patrick and Bobbin Mulvaney are well known throughout the region as much for the food at Mulvaney's Building and Loan as they are their community involvement. Building community is a value that Bobbin learned in her youth, when her family owned a restaurant in a Central Valley farming community.

"That's the place that the farmers and the cops and the principal and the business people stopped for breakfast," she says of her first restaurant. "It determined how the community was going to move through issues ... I have always known that a restaurant was a great conduit for that." But once on her own she wanted to be out of the business, until she met Patrick. "When I met Patrick, I met a chef who was interested in both sides of [the industry]. The magic just happened and it was beautiful."

They also try to build a sense of community with their staff at Mulvaney's. During the "Happy Trails" send-off thrown on each employee's last night, the exiting staff member gets a pie in the face, followed by laughs and reminiscing.

"The way we reinforce what we want the community of this restaurant to be is through stories," says Patrick. "[With Happy Trails] there is this interconnectedness of the stories and a shared experience, and the shared experience is what makes people stay and work or find value."

Bobbin adds that they make sure to keep the future health of their relationship in mind as well. "I never want to tell him what I think is a negative issue about him without being able to say, 'I think this might be a better way to hit this or this might be a better way to handle that,'" she says. "I think we are hard enough on ourselves and we need to be gentle with ourselves. I need to be a soft place for him to land and he really does the same with me."

The Mulvaney's: Parental Affirmation

IN THE EARLY 80S, AT THE WALDORF IN NEW YORK CITY, PATRICK MULVANEY'S MOTHER CHATTED WITH THE HEAD CHEF IN THE DINING ROOM. "MRS. MULVANEY, WE LOVE PATRICK," SAID THE CHEF. "HE'S A NICE BOY — A HORRIBLE COOK, BUT IT'S GREAT TO HAVE HIM IN THE KITCHEN." "IT'S A PHASE," SAID HIS MOM. "HE'S GOING BACK TO SCHOOL." "I HAVE AN ART DEGREE," SAID THE CHEF. "EVERY DAY I DO WHAT I LOVE ... WHAT MORE CAN WE WANT FOR OUR CHILDREN THEN ... A FULFILLED LIFE." IN THAT MOMENT, AS PATRICK TELLS IT, "MY MOTHER FLIPPED FROM, 'WE JUST PUT YOU THROUGH COLLEGE,' TO 'MY SON IS HAPPY, AND THIS IS HIS FUTURE.'"

Don't make it all about work. Do try to turn it off when the business day is done.

All three family owners cite "turning it off" when the day is done as one of their biggest challenges. In fact, not one of them said they feel they've mastered it.

Doug points out how blurred the lines between personal and professional life become when in business with your partner. "For us, you know 22 years, it becomes your life and your social aspect and professional aspect become one," he says. "What we've seen sometimes is the rolling of our kids' eyes or the glazed over look on their faces when we are actively engaged in a discussion. Turning it off and not talking about this is very hard for both of us."

Patrick and Bobbin try not to talk about their work when they are off the clock. "When we are on vacation we don't talk about business," Bobbin says. "We just came back from being gone for seven days and we didn't talk about it."

For the Endelman sons, making sure that they spend non-work time together is essential. "We see each other a lot, outside of work as well," says Paul. "We'll go out to dinner with [our parents] two nights a week, and we'll do pilates on Monday mornings with Mom and Dad. We see each other all the time."

And finally, it's important not to forget why you went into business together in the first place.

"I'm doing this job because I am having a good time — and I'll keep doing it until I'm not having any more fun," Ken says. "The money is the by-product and that's kind of why it works, I think."

"We are doing it on our own terms, which is really why we did this in the first place," Doug says, of how he and Pam keep their ultimate goal in mind. "It was about freedom. That's what drives everything."

Don't let nepotism rule. Do hold everyone accountable.

"I think the worst thing that can happen is to bring a family member in and have them be underperforming, versus having my kids in here and seen as net contributors, not detractors," says Ken. Sending this message throughout the organization meant making tough decisions when his sons joined the Balanced Body team. As a teenager, Adam was fired by his dad for talking about his wage — a violation of Ken's company policy.

"I was all of 16 or 17 at the time, and it was a great lesson," Adam says. The trio says it also fostered respect for leadership among the company's employees, and the incident has become a legend among staff.

"We were always brought up to be as humble and respectful to the CEO as we were to the person who empties our trash cans," Adam continues. "That was the real touchpoint, there's no differentiation."

The Endelmans: Timing is Everything

"THE EVENT THAT TRIGGERED THIS WHOLE THING WAS I HAD A CUSTOM FURNITURE STORE IN HOLLYWOOD IN THE 70S," KEN ENDELMAN EXPLAINS. "A CUSTOMER AND PILATES INSTRUCTOR ASKED ME TO BUILD A PILATES MACHINE. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THAT WAS. I TRIED TO GET RID OF HER, DID EVERYTHING I COULD TO AVOID HER ... THIS WAS HOLLYWOOD AND EVERYONE WHO WALKED THROUGH YOUR DOOR HAD SOME WACKY IDEA TO MAKE YOU RICH ... I FINALLY RAN OUT OF EXCUSES." HE BUILT THE MACHINE AND BALANCED BODY WAS BORN. THEN, THERE WERE SIX BALANCED BODY PILATES STUDIOS WORLDWIDE. NOW, THOUSANDS.