

Family Business Center with Dan Beenken and Jayne Kielman

Patrick: Welcome to the Building a Better Iowa Podcast.

Intro Music

Patrick: Hello, everyone, welcome back to another episode of the Business and Community Services podcast up here at UNI. This is Patrick Luensmann, your host today. I'm joined by Katie, Dan and Jayne. Got an exciting episode for you today we're going to be talking to the Family Business Center and all the good work that they do here at the University of Northern Iowa. Quick Intro audit that Katie's gonna bring us through. So Katie, what exactly are they doing over there at the family business center?

Katie: Yeah, so while every Iowa business faces challenges, the University of Northern Iowa Family Business Center has found that their specific need for support and conserving family businesses and our home state of Iowa, the Family Business Center is able to create a community of family businesses that have the ability to learn about business governments continuity, strategic planning, leadership transition and growth together. So Dan and Jayne, can you tell us, in your own words, what is a family business?

Jayne: A family business really is set up in that it is two or more family members that are involved in a business. And that control either lies within the family that is involved in the operation, sometimes the family is not involved in the daily operations. So there's lots of different equations, whether it be husband, wife, siblings, cousins, there's no one formula but again, it's the idea of two family members that decided to have a business.

Patrick: That is definitely a lot of the businesses in Iowa, right? How many – If you're gonna put a ballpark on it – How many businesses in Iowa currently fall under that definition of family business? Make it up if you don't know, you know, 66% of statistics are made up on the spot. So give us a ballpark Dan.

Dan: I would guess it's in that 70 to 80% range that are family owned, or family controlled, or family run by our definitions.

Patrick: Awesome. Well, we're excited to have you on the podcast today to talk more about the center – everything that you're doing to support, you know, family businesses all across Iowa. And so we've heard a little bit about what is the family business? So what? What is their importance? Like why – why family business? I guess, is the question. We've just – whether it's true or not, almost to about three quarters of our businesses would qualify as family businesses. So in the focus of, you know, why are they important? And then what are some of the things that you're doing to help them succeed?

Dan: Yeah, I think that's a great question, obviously. You know, what, what makes them special, so to speak? Why is that important? I would say, the first part of why that's important is because

the Iowa economic fabric is dominated by my family businesses. They're, they're critical to rural areas, they're obviously a large portion of the employer base in the state. That oftentimes they do so much for their communities from a philanthropic and a give back, and community Betterment position as well and we just recognize how critical they are to the micro economies around the state. And we want to make sure that we help them as much as we can with their stability and longevity.

Patrick: So what do some of those needs look like? Like when you're in your business with husband or wife or son or daughter what are some of those other things that pop up that maybe non family businesses don't ever have to think about?

Jayne: That's a great question and it looks different, but the same in all family businesses, because it could be family personalities, family conflicts, it could be next generation development, knowing that you have a generation that at some point will take over the succession of the family business. For that older generation, it is looking at succession in deciding if and when that transition should take place.

Katie: So what does the Family Business Center at UNI do in terms of programming and other support and resources to help our family businesses?

Dan: Yeah, so our programming is really centered around the family business of course. We offer consulting, we do succession planning consulting, but I think the biggest part of what we do is we bring families together to learn from each other. The peer learning aspect is powerful for them. Many times they're in a position as a family where they think they're the only one's going through this XYZ issue, you know, be it a family issue, a business issue, or typically something that involves both the family and the business. And, and being around their peers hearing from their peers on how they've adjusted or, or dealt with something like that, I think is where they really find value. So we have events throughout the year that are virtual for us, we call it our breakfast series. There's no bacon involved but we do that in every other month via zoom and then we have a conference that we do in the fall, where we get folks together to be in person and talk through things and, and another big piece of our programming is our peer groups. And we have peer groups that are focused on either the next generation of family or the current generation as maybe current CEOs are also those that are kind of moving out of our succession and out of leadership – we call that our legacy group. And so we've got many different avenues for folks to plug in.

Patrick: Yeah, that's awesome. And I've had the ability to be at some of those family business forums, breakfast. I don't think I ever got any bacon either but we'll work on that. Can you talk a bit about some of the specific topics or different things that you've hosted in terms of panels over the last, I think it's been three years now that you've done those?

Jayne: We just got done doing one recently in succession. Obviously, an important topic to any family business so that topic typically is on the schedule, each of our sessions. We have one coming up on boards, in the idea of having strategic boards for a family business, and what that

looks like why potentially to have a board. And then one of the topics we'll have coming up in May, is actually to look at some of Iowa's 100 year old businesses, and lessons that could be learned from those businesses. Otherwise, we've covered topics about family conflict with Next Generation topics. So we really get a variety of discussions going.

Katie: Are there any interesting stories or personalities that have come out of those topics? Or your work in general?

Patrick: Not all at the same time, there was one that I got to go to the hand here in my notes. This was Mr. Tom Hubler. Right? I dubbed him grandpa Tom, I think I think that's kind of stuck. He stuck out to me, because he had a couple of different acronyms that he used to talk through how the family business could approach those difficult conversations. I believe the first one was heart. Right?

Dan: Yeah. When you talk about interesting stories, I would say that maybe to protect the innocent, we won't get into that too much. But I think one thing that always resonates with our families is that when they hear another family talking about a chemical dependency issue, a drug issue, a criminal past, somebody who's gone off the rails, frankly in their family at some level, some sort of Jerry Springer moment I think they're always quickly comforted, if that's the right word, to know that other families have had those same issues. And, we really promote that kind of a confidential, trusting environment for our group and you see that come through in the way that they're willing to share some of those exact types of things that you might otherwise watch on daytime TV that otherwise really do happen for these family companies.

Patrick: Well, I think every family has that right?

Dan: Absolutely. But when you mix money and blood together, it gets even more heightened.

Jayne: And a business and a daily operation, it does become a little different in terms of elements and how you combine that and navigate that when it's family that you see outside of work and when you go to work, it's your family that's intertwined in it.

Patrick: Yeah, that's not something I'd probably want to do, but that's why I'm here doing this podcast with you versus hanging out with the family all day. What are—when you think about you know, everyone that's listening here, obviously at some level has a family that they have either still talked to you or don't in terms of like adding that to the the business side of things, you know, outside of the maybe interpersonal conflicts or things like that, as families begin to grow. How are some of those families you know, managing that ever—extended family?

Dan: Yeah, they are. You know, one one thing that we talked about that maybe Jayne didn't mention yet, but one topic that we continually hit on is governance. When most people hear that they think about, you know, obviously outside government, federal state, whatever, but families have governance as well. And they have their own documents and families that have been around for 100 years, like we're going to be talking about in a few months. They do a lot of those

things where they put policies and procedures in place that help circumvent a lot of conflict. They help people stay on the same page and feel like they're being treated equally. An example might be, if you want to come work in the business, you're not going to be able to report to Mom and Dad, you're going to have to maybe report to your uncle, or you're going to have to report to somebody who's non-family. If you want to come work in the business, you're going to have to work somewhere else for a couple of years. Different things like that, that we see built into family constitutions, family employment policies. We've had many families in this day and age that have social media codes of conduct, where we're only going to post or allow our family to post certain things online. We're not going to—we're not going to go down certain paths, certain topics, are not going to be part of what we're going to want our individual family members to be doing on there. Because we are a family, oftentimes, we're under a bit of a magnifying glass in the community. And we want to make sure that they're the family—knows that we are branded as our business. And so things that we might do, as individuals are going to come really quickly back to the business, if you can imagine yourself posting something online, very few people, if any, are going to think of where you work and align your styles and ideas with that, but in a family business that is all part and parcel all wrapped together.

Patrick: In this day and age that's never been more important, especially for families and running their business, because it's all melded together. With a point you brought up, Dan, I thought that was pretty interesting was the non-family employees, you know, as these companies begin to grow, and they have people that aren't family, first, are there any resources for the families to look at how they deal with their non-family employees to make sure that it's some level it's equitable? That they're getting the support or promotions or, you know, anti-nepotism? I'm not sure if that's the word. If the family members get treated favorably, how do you make sure that the non-family employees, you know, are still—in the in the running I guess is maybe the thought, any anything that's, you know, anyone's that's ever talked about how they've brought in their non-family employees to make sure they felt like, there—maybe they're not, you know, family by blood, but they're at least part of the business family?

Dan: Yeah, I mean, I think that's a good point because I think you hear oftentimes, anecdotally, or, you know of people in your own circle that work for a family owned company, and they might talk about all the glass ceiling, so to speak of, well I've climbed as far as I can in this company, because now Jr. and the siblings or the cousins, or whoever it might be, you know, they're that next layer, and they don't typically allow anybody else in, right? I think what you see and what we'll find from our—rom our topic on 100 year old firms is that it truly—look at in those families that are proactive and acknowledging and objective about that, that they are able to look at a position, think about the—think about the what needs to be done and then think about the who, as a secondary part of that. And sometimes that who is family, and sometimes that who is not family. And we see those companies that are able to stick around generationally for longer periods of time, I think are those that are able to professionalize the business to bring in outside executives, to recognize that they don't always have all the answers and that there easily could be somebody else outside of their four walls of their house or their other family that maybe could run the business better than they can and those that are able to come to grips with that and think through that in a healthy way. I think they are often set up more for success.

Patrick: No, I think that's a great—great point and glad that those companies are looking to take advantage of that talent that isn't necessarily related to them, that they can continue to grow and and service the business. So for those of you who are new to the podcast, or maybe listening before, and again, my name is Patrick and I'm the only one on the episode today that doesn't work for the Family Business Center though they're dear friends and right across the hall from me here at the BCS building. So Dan's the director, right? Can you do an intro of everyone else here just so we know who's whose voice is whose?

Dan: Yeah, yeah. So I'm Dan Beenken and I guess I direct the center, run the center, but I have two great colleagues that helped me out on a daily basis. We have a great team. And I'll let Katie introduce herself.

Katie: Sure, I am Katie Kreis and I provide marketing services for the team. So any support from design, to web, to social and, and anywhere else I can help too. And Jayne I will throw it to you now.

Jayne: I'm Jayne Kielman and I work with business development. So I look at being the connector between family businesses and our programming. So my favorite part is reaching out to families or through referrals, being able to introduce them to our programming and have them check out our community, either virtually or in person.

Patrick: I think that's a perfect segue to Jayne into how, as a family business that's, you know, coming across our podcast today, how can they get involved or check out some of the stuff that you've got to offer?

Jayne: Great question, they just need to check out our website, which has a full schedule, email, call, any of us three, Dan, Katie and myself are available. And we have some virtual programming coming up in March, and in May, and some face to face events as well that we would love a family or an individual to try out.

Patrick: And events throughout—throughout the year too right?

Jayne: Yes.

Patrick Continues to go forward and to grow.

Jayne: Exactly. We operate similar to a school calendar. So we are coming towards the—the end of the school year and programming. But we'll relaunch with a ton of new programming starting in August. And so excited about a conference that we will host in November that we just got done doing for the first time last November, and was able to bring Iowa families together to learn from each other. Craig Culver joined us as well, so had some great role modeling in terms of other family businesses.

Patrick: Yeah, and the events, especially the in person ones are awesome, you know, as we're still potentially still trying to figure out all the logistics of those things given you know, COVID

and whatnot. I know over the past couple years, we've had some other really cool ones hosted in local Iowa family owned businesses. Can you talk a little bit about what those events were and kind of where you went and what you got to do?

Jayne: I sure can. So we did a Tour and Talk in Boone with Fareway. So the family of Reynolds, Reynolds Kramer and his family have the day with us in terms of touring and later talking about the dynamics of their family and the progress that Fareway has made not only in the state, but beyond the state. And then in November, we were at EFCO, which is a family business in Des Moines. And they were gracious to host us at their facility where we had ended up with close to 130 or 40 different individuals that represented probably 50 or 60 different family businesses. And so we were able to hear their story, as well as breakout into sessions that were very focused on issues with NexGeneration leadership and with Legacy and so not only learned with that family, but also had a lot of other voices in the mix as well.

Patrick: No, those are both two awesome events. And since I know the history a little bit too. I know that the first one was hosted with the Vermeer Corporation.

Jayne: Yeah, if we rewind that, a little back , yeah way back. And so Vermeer and Pella, we spent a day with them. In fact, we've had a couple events there. They've been a great family. We continue to work with Heidi Vermeer-Quist, who facilitates our NexGen generation leadership groups, and Mary Andringa, who is leading our Legacy Groups. We spent a day learning through their family and touring their facility. We have an event coming up in June in which we'll be bringing the Next Generation and the Legacy Groups together for a day of learning.

Patrick: Well, that'd be fun getting Nexgen and Legacy together for them to bounce those ideas off of each other. The events are—are so well done and so great to attend both for the families that are hosting them and all the families that get to participate and take part. So be sure to—to check out the website and look those up to see if you can catch and join in on the next one. Dan, as you're thinking about the Family Business Center and looking forward to the rest of this year into the future. What are some of the goals that you're really looking to try to achieve with the Family Business Center?

Dan: Yeah, that's timely actually, because our team has been going through some strategic planning this week and the last few weeks actually, but you know, some of our main goals are—the top goal for us as always connecting families, finding—making sure they know about us, I think that's a big thing for any small program like ours, where we don't have massive marketing budgets is to make sure that, you know, families across Iowa know that we are the center for the entire state. And that a lot of our programming is virtual and so therefore, logistically, they're able to participate. Some of the things that we're excited about putting together I think going forward is we're starting to partner with some outside groups that work with a lot of families, too. We're not the only ones in this family game by any means. And there are great attorney groups, CPA firms, wealth advisory firms and others that do a lot of work with family owned companies. Part of our goal is to try to bring those folks together to talk in a kind of a concentrated and

orchestrated way with our families about how one thing affects another especially when it comes to estate and succession planning. So we've got a couple things coming up with our partners, from the private sector on that. Over the summer, we've talked about maybe doing something on a social basis with families, so maybe there'll be some sort of a wine tasting in our future or something like that. Those are a couple of things. And of course, we're right now in the middle of looking for our keynote speaker for next year's conference. And so we've got some, actually some pretty big names that we're looking at working with that are big, large families, global families in fact, that might be our speakers for our next event there.

Patrick: Well, that's awesome. Put me on the list for the wine tasting and let me—let me know when that is.

Dan: You got it!

Patrick: Before we wrap today, again, we're so proud of the work that you guys are doing at the Family Business Center here at UNI and serving families all across Iowa. So whether it's economic development partners, people in the state legislature, internal to UNI, whoever you know is hearing this, be sure to reach out. Check in and see how you can either connect that family business that you know, in your community, or maybe it's your own family business, and get them looped in and get them connected to be able to do that. And to be able to find that, Katie, you want to give them a quick rundown of how they can connect?

Katie: Absolutely! You can go to UNIFamilyBusinessCenter.com and find all of the information you need to get started. There's some contact forms to fill out, you know what you're looking for and you can register for events. I would say just go ahead and do that and we'll reach out to you and see if we can be of greater service to you beyond those events. Otherwise, follow us on social media on LinkedIn and Facebook. Just search "UNI Family Business Center", and we should pop up.

Patrick: Awesome. Well, any final thoughts Dan or Jayne for the Family Business Center today?

Dan: I guess first of all, I would just say thanks to Patrick and Katie for giving us the opportunity here to talk a little bit about our program. We have a lot of passion for the family businesses that we work with. It's been a great ride for us as well and I look forward to seeing some of you at some of our future programming. Thanks for listening.

Patrick: Awesome. If you haven't yet followed or subscribe to the Building a Better Iowa Podcast and whatever platform you're listening to us on. We're gonna be here weekly with content, talking about what's going on at the Business and Community Services Division here at the University of Northern Iowa. We thank you for being here and joining us to build a better Iowa!

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