

Family Business Review

When Your Parents Sign the Paychecks: Finding Career Success Inside or Outside the Family Business, by Greg McCann.
Indianapolis, IN: JIST Works, 2007.
\$19.95, Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-59357-323-2.

This book is a perfect gift for a young person in college who may be interested in exploring the opportunities, challenges, and possibilities of joining a family business. It was written by Greg McCann, who is the founder of a family business center at Stetson University in Florida. He has obviously worked with scores of young students because his book is full of practical tools, models, self-inquiry processes, and examples that will make this book a staple of family business programs and centers. It offers material that I have not seen in any other family business book.

The book takes some creative steps that make it incredibly useful and unique. First of all, it is not written for a generic person, but for a real-life young person who has many questions and only a dim idea of what to expect. McCann has three people in mind as his readers, profiled in the first chapter as the Amateur, the Semi-Pro, and the Professional, each of which is accompanied by a bio and has different aims and visions of their career. I have not seen this distinction elsewhere, and it will speak loud and clear to a young person who is beginning to set life goals. For each issue, the different views of these three young people are introduced, and the different paths each one would want to take are explained. This approach helps legitimize and benchmark the reader's progress as he or she (hopefully) evolves toward professional status.

This book is a hybrid of a career development guide, a how-to-succeed self-help manual, and an introduction to family business. Throughout, McCann keeps his tone and level of presentation clearly aimed at young people. He leads them step by step through the basic concepts of the different roles and frameworks of a family business, but addresses all the basic questions that young people ask about their preparation for a career. In fact, McCann is correct that career preparation for family business has to begin with the fundamentals—with a self-assessment, an inquiry into one's skills and goals, and decision to be made that may take one in several directions. The family business is one choice, but should not early in life be the only choice. He even frames the family business opportunity in a context broader than a one-time job offer: three life-long relationships—family member, potential employee, and potential owner/heir.

The topics covered in this book are a hierarchical set of questions and activities for a young person growing up in a family business. It has four parts: (1) understanding family business issues, (2) meeting life-long challenges in a family business, (3) facing challenges as a young adult, and (4) defining one's career and becoming a professional. What McCann has done masterfully is to put these family business challenges into the context of learning about self and personal development. In fact, the parts of the book on self-development are among the best I have seen in nonfamily business career development books. He presents the steps for a young person that will develop a clear personal identity, and some of the ways that a family and its business may make that even more difficult. He frames emotional issues with clear questions, good graphic models that speak to experience, and some good reflective activities that help the

JOURNAL
OF THE
FAMILY
FIRM
INSTITUTE

Book Review

**When Your
Parents Sign the
Paychecks:
Finding Career
Success Inside
or Outside the
Family Business
— By Greg
McCann**

*DENNIS T. JAFFE, Ph.D.
PROFESSOR
SAYBROOK COLLEGE*

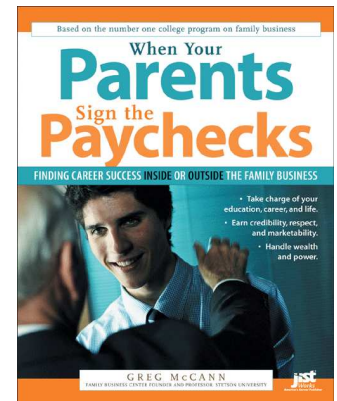
reader reflect on each issue personally.

He frames common issues that all young people have about careers in the special context of a family business. It is in the nature of this book that it focuses more on the personal and emotional challenges of working in a family business, than on the business issues. McCann presents the basic concepts of family systems, the key models of family business interaction, and the common family dynamics issues. He is not preaching or demanding, but framing each issue in terms of how best to prepare for a positive experience. It is to be hoped that young people can avoid all the disasters that we know about by being proactive and dealing with the challenges of family business upfront.

One of the most creative elements of the book comes from the fact that McCann is not writing a book, he is envisioning a process, creating a learning system that includes classroom learning and dialogue within the family. It is traditional for a textbook author to create a teacher guide, and McCann provides one that helps the teacher use the material, with reflective questions, supplementary material, and quizzes. More important, and more unusual, he also has written a supplementary parent guide. Recognizing that many students want something to share with their parents and that many parents are also wrestling in a different way with the same issues, McCann offers a guide for parents that addresses each issue from the parents' perspective, and makes suggestions for how the family can open the issue among themselves. This means that as a young person uses the book and does his or her own reflections, there is also a guide to move these thoughts into family action, where they need to go. This guide greatly enhances the utility of the book.

The book is very well laid out and useful. It contains inviting and easy-to-read boxes with key words, concepts, good graphics, and helpful self-assessment activities. The book could be used as a supplementary text for a family business course, or as a tool for a consultant to give to a young client who is thinking about his or her future in the family enterprise. What makes the book most useful is McCann's grounding in the psychological reality of a young person. The book continually takes the reader into the personal and emotional dilemmas that arise in a family. It is never abstract, overly conceptual, or unclear. Each point has good examples, and is clearly laid out. It could be faulted for being at too elementary a level, but that is a minor issue because it is written at precisely the level of a young person in his or her late teens. If it were more advanced it might be better for older (say, age 30 years) MBA students, but it would lose its primary audience. I think McCann's choice to be clear and simple is the right one.

It is interesting to wonder whether a young person using the tools in this book could fruitfully challenge the older generation, which does not necessarily subscribe to ideas about communication, personal development and empowerment, and transparency, and family and business issues. My sense is that rather than wait for the older generation to explain, McCann is implicitly suggesting that a young person has to take the initiative in order to ensure a positive experience. McCann's attitude about family business clearly comes from the "appreciative" school of management—where the focus is on the positive, what can be and what is wanted, rather than a focus on negative possibilities and mutual blame.



Joseph H. Astrachan, *Editor*

March 2007

Volume XX

Number 1

Citation:

**DENNIS T. JAFFE Ph.D.
PROFESSOR
SAYBROOK COLLEGE
(2007)**

**When Your Parents
Sign the Paychecks:
Finding Career Success
Inside or Outside the
Family Business - By
Greg McCann**

**Family Business Review
20 (3), 267–268.**