

10 WAYS TO NUTURE FAMILY COHESIVENESS



BY
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For most of us, our deepest sources of happiness or misery are likely to stem from whether our intimate relationships are going well or not. The truth is, investing the thought, energy, and time to create close and enduring family relationships is as important as anything a family can do

Frank Perdue understood this, and he wasn't about to leave having a high-functioning family to chance. Busy as he was building a Fortune-500 size business, he still put tremendous effort into creating and supporting a culture of family cohesiveness.

When he and I were courting back in 1988, he told me that having a close family was one of the most important things in his life. People sometimes ask me if I was involved in running the business, and the answer is: No, but I was involved in something that was at least as important to Frank: fostering a culture that nurtured family cohesiveness.

Here are some of the things he and I did together to encourage family harmony.

1. Have a family vacation at least every 18 months. In a geographically dispersed family, having the cousins spend time together and play together can mean building friendship and trust that only happen when they spend time together.
2. Arrange to endow your family vacation even after you're gone. Frank did this because he knew that families are in danger of drifting apart after the patriarch is gone.
3. Make the vacation appealing to those with young children. To encourage everyone to attend, include in the budget funds for baby sitters and have child-friendly activities
4. Write a monthly family newsletter. Initially, our newsletter consisted of my interviewing Frank about the values and the family

history that he wanted to share with younger family members. Over time, the newsletter grew to include descriptions of engagements, weddings, and interviews with prospective new family members whenever there was an engagement. There are also many articles on how family members are doing in their careers.

5. Have a family album each year. Ours is a hardcover book made using Apple's Aperture software. In ours, I try to have a photograph of each member and a caption on what the individual is up to. My favorite theme, although I don't do it every year, is to have "the family question." This changes from year to year, but one year it might be, "Who is the person you most admire, and why?" Another year it's, "What is your earliest memory," and still another is, "Magic, magic, there are two extra hours in every day. How would you spend the extra time?" The answers to the family question are often surprising, and we end up knowing more about each other this way. It's bonding.
6. Have traditions. Tradition is the lifeblood of identity, and one of ours is, Frank was involved with the recovering the sunken treasure ship Atocha, Because of this, we have some beautiful silver coins from it. When there's a new bride in the family, she gets a silver necklace with a silver Atocha coin. What traditions can your family encourage?
7. Have an education committee. Planning to keep the family educated and abreast of what's going on in the business world can be a tremendously bonding experience. It gets people focused on a common goal, and it's apt to start many conversations about what is important for the family.
8. Decide what educational topics most interest the family. In the case of my family, I found on the Internet the five topics that most families want to be educated on, and asked family members to rank the order of their importance. The five topics that came up most often on what families would like more education on are: How the family business works; Governance (as in, how do we make decisions in a way that promotes

harmony); Financial literacy; Wealth literacy; and Education on philanthropy.

9. Arrange ways of carrying out the educational objectives. Our committee organizes plant visits, newsletters, reviews of family business books, and and inspirational speakers at our annual stockholder meeting and during our annual vacation.
10. Hire family business experts to fine-tune your family cohesion efforts. Frank used John Ward and today we use Jennifer Pendergast. Family harmony is important not just for the happiness of family members but also for the stability of the business. Anything you can do to nurture it is a wise investment.

Many families don't stay intact over the generations. This is likely to happen when the first generation leaves it to chance. And if you fail to plan, it's like planning to fail. The good news is, planning is something you can do, and even better, the implementation can be enjoyable and fulfilling. And as for the results: they can be life changing.



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