

The Huffington Post



[Peggy Drexler](#)

Lost and Found: Running the Company Dad Built

Posted February 17, 2009 | 08:50 AM (EST)

Of all the changes impacting the worlds of daughters and dads, few rival the growing trend of daughters not just joining the family business, but taking them over.

It brings fathers and daughters together in ways that at the same time evidence progress and break barriers; opens doors and inject complications.

Once rare, daughters taking over the family business is becoming not only accepted, but - for many fathers - preferred. Some anecdotal studies show that a more collaborative female managing style simply makes for a smoother transition than the competition that can warp the connection between father and son.

As I talked with women who took over the life time labor of toil and love that their fathers had built, I found that many were moved (pushed) along by the relationship, some fought to recreate it on new terms; and some found it so difficult that they turned their back on it and, to a degree, on the man who built it.

Lila, who is being groomed to take over her father's pharmaceutical business, says the relationship brought significant advantages. "I was an economics major," she said. "and I thought I was going to end up on Wall Street. But he talked me into coming onto the business, and he gave me every opportunity and experience. He pushed me, supported me and stood up for me. Telling him I wanted to take time off to start a family was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. He said that he wanted me to be happy, and that the company would still be there when I was ready to come back. It wouldn't have been that way at another company."

Carissa enjoyed the same kind of support, but found that her love and respect for the man who raised her got in the way of their working relationship. "My dad founded our small bottling company," she said. He kept it lean, so there aren't a lot of layers. We all work closely. That was a problem. I didn't always agree with his ideas, and I had my own. But growing up, he was the boss. So I found it hard to go toe to toe with him. And when I did, I could tell he didn't quite know how to handle it. It was like I was talking back to him. But I realized I had to get past that. We've had some pretty good battles. But his respect for me has grown."

Inez's father begged her to leave her career as an art gallery executive to help him save their small-town manufacturing business. As soon as the business was on solid ground, he promised, he would sell it, and she could return to her life in New York City, a city she loved.

After three years of hard work, and winning the grudging acceptance of the workers, she did help right the business. But she realized that her father had no intention of selling it. He thought she would adjust to small town life, and stay on to be his successor. She returned to New York. They haven't spoken in a year.

"Life is full of hard lessons," she said. "But when the lesson is that you can't trust your own father, it hurts."

For eons, a son taking over the family business has been a right of passage. Those transitions are not always smooth. But when you inject the paternalistic bonds of love and respect between father and daughter, it's a transition that introduces new elements.

For any daughter taking over from dad, those elements are part of the decision -- and part of the package. They can be good, or bad, but seldom neutral. Most of all, they can't be ignored.

*The data I compiled and the patterns I've observed for this series are presented as collective experiences. I have honored promises of confidentiality by changing names and disguising identities.