

When business, family intersect

BY MARY HOWE

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The director of the University of Massachusetts Amherst Family Business Center has a New Yorker cartoon posted on his door that depicts a man speaking to a cluster of young children. He is saying, "I've called the family together to announce that, because of inflation, I'm going to have to let two of you go."

In a nutshell, the picture demonstrates one challenge of family-owned businesses. That is, some principles of the business world, like controlling costs and using human resources efficiently, are in conflict with principles of the family, like loving, supporting and sustaining younger and struggling members.

"You always have to be very clear about what hat you are wearing," said Ira Bryck, director of the family business center at UMass, in Hadley, Mass. "A

company president might need to tell a worker, 'Speaking as your brother, I would give you a kidney; speaking as your employer, we are thinning the herd here, and you have to go.'"

"American Mussel Harvesters Inc. founder Bill Silkes, 60, says that maintaining his boss role and his father role is a constant challenge.

The North Kingstown company grows, ships, and markets live shellfish to customers across the country. Silkes founded the business in 1986, and its 35 employees include his sons, Gregory, 28, Adam, 26, and Mason, 22. The elder Silkes also owns the 9-year-old Saltwater Farms, an oyster and mussel farming operation.

"I ask myself," Silkes said, "Am I being fair to all of the children and do they perceive it that way, or do they think I am showing favoritism?"

For example, Silkes decided to send his second son, Adam, to an aquaculture conference in San Diego because Adam was the more logical choice due to the nature of his work. So Silkes talked to his older son, Gregory, to make sure he did not feel slighted. One factor that helped in this instance, Silkes said, was that all the sons' job descriptions are well-defined.

At the **Jenn Lee Group**, a rule prohibiting talk about work after 7 p.m. was put in place when Jennifer Lee Bogutt, president and founder, decided in January to hire her husband, Michael Bogutt, as the East Greenwich company's new director of business development. The 7-year-old firm works on advertising, marketing and public relations.

Jennifer Bogutt said she and her husband talked exhaustively about the risks and benefits of bringing him onto her staff before they took

the plunge. Ultimately, they decided that Michael could bring the passion and abstract thinking that the position needed. She said the two have a successful marriage, and they decided to make a parallel move into work, for the benefit of the business.

Michael Bogutt said he and his wife had been talking for years about the daily tasks and challenges of her communications business before he came onboard. He quipped, "I'm finally getting paid for all this advice I've been giving." Because of their frequent and open conversation, he said, they have both evolved past the point where they get bent out of shape over disagreements. The solution to working through disagreements, Michael Bogutt said, "is to keep the argument within the con-

text of the topic." He believes this maturation in their personal life also will serve them well in business.

Daily life at the office since he joined the staff has been smooth, Michael said. The 10-person staff bustles, with everyone busy with his or her own tasks. "We don't spend much time together during the day," he said. "It is not like we get home at night and look at each other and say, 'oh, not you again.'"

Michael and Jennifer drive separately to work, he said, because both need a car during the day. On the occasions that they have driven to work together, they turn the radio on and refrain from business talk until they get to the office. The 7 p.m. rule applies until the 9 a.m. whistle blows the next day. ■



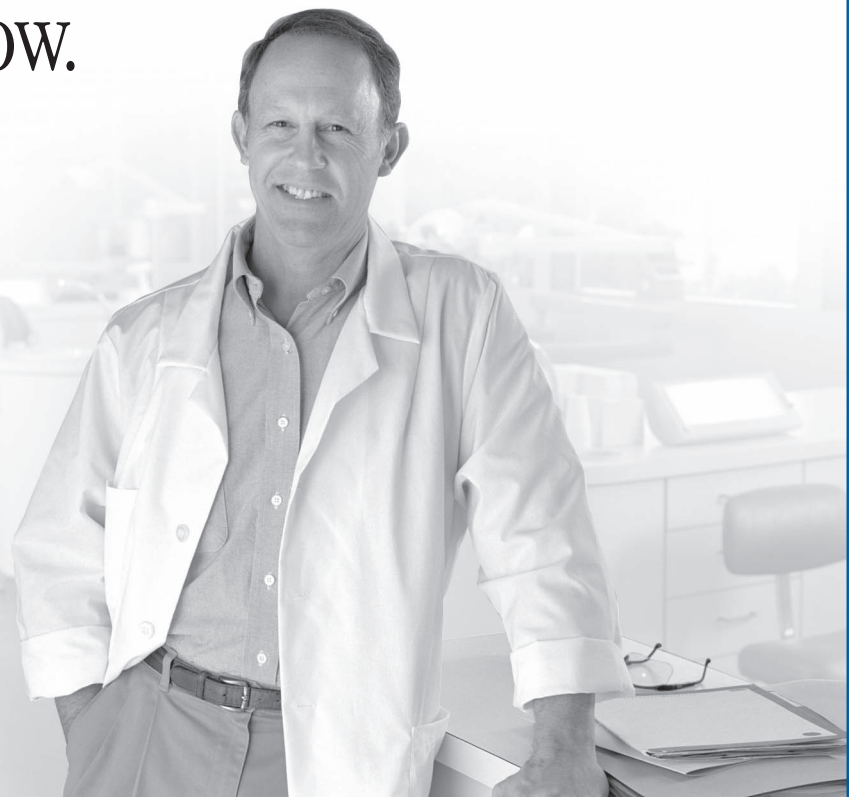
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MAKING IT WORK: Husband and wife Michael and Jennifer Lee Bogutt. Jennifer is president of the Jenn Lee Group, where she hired her husband to work.



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