

# Family Business Wisdom, Thoughts & Education

COMMUNICATION & CONFLICT, FAMILY MEETINGS

## LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD: BRING ALL VOICES INTO MEETINGS

MAY 28, 2015 | ANNE HARGRAVE



*Anne Hargrave*

Have you ever walked out of a meeting thinking that it went very well, only to learn later that many in the group were frustrated and discouraged?

Or, have you worked hard to formulate your thoughts for a meeting and then just couldn't find an opportunity to voice them?

The differences between extroverts and introverts in planning and decision making processes have a direct impact on how people feel about their roles, their ability to contribute and, ultimately, the success of the endeavor.

Adam Grant of Wharton, Dave Hofmann of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Francesca Gino of Harvard conducted a study within 57 locations of a pizza chain to determine the impact on profitability of extroverted leadership when the employees were passive versus proactive.

They found that extroverted leadership was linked to significantly higher profits when employees were passive, but significantly lower profits with employees who were proactive. In Gino's [Harvard Business Review article](#) about the study, she notes that in stores with passive employees, those led by extroverts achieved 16% higher profits than those led by introverts. However, in stores with proactive employees, those led by extroverts achieved 14% lower profits. The results suggest that introverts can use their talents more effectively with proactive team members because they are more open to those who champion new visions, promote better strategies and introduce changes.

Understanding and managing the dynamic in a group is essential to being able to have effective discussions. Extroverts have a tendency towards group interaction, talking to think and sharing ideas openly – they gather their energy from the group. Introverts don't like to be interrupted, often pre-

fer quieter environments and need to think before taking action or speaking. They gather their energy with quiet time, reflection and focus on topics of importance to them.

Structuring family business meetings to take into consideration the differences between introverts and extroverts levels the playing field, and provides a platform for everyone to be heard.

As a new client recently said, “We are listening to each other better, but we need to quiet the talkers so that they can hear the other great ideas!”

What can you put into place to encourage everyone to have a voice?

Here are a few ideas that have worked for other families:

- Learn about each other’s personal style. Take an assessment like the Myers Briggs and learn about how people gather information, make decisions, gain energy and deal with the outside world.
- Provide the materials for a meeting well in advance of the meeting.
- Agree to read meeting materials in advance. Consider providing a “pre-meeting” time on the agenda for those who have a tendency to do it at the last minute.
- Identify specific questions in an agenda for those who need time to reflect and collect their thoughts.
- Offer an opportunity for meeting participants to ask questions in advance of the meeting to obtain clarity on a proposal.
- Open the meeting by asking each person in the room to answer a question, setting a time limit for the answer. Use the opportunity to get to know each other better, share insights and practice listening to each other.
- Have the group leader or facilitator actively create an opportunity for each person to speak, while encouraging the louder voices to enjoy the listening process.
- Break into small groups, even twosomes, to bring out the thinking of those who may be less apt to speak up in a group scenario.
- Offer opportunities for participants to write down their thoughts and have the facilitator read them out anonymously.
- Have each person speak directly to the facilitator, not each other, if the topic has a lot of emotion attached to it. Invite others to ask a question of the speaker, but direct it to the facilitator.
- Take breaks frequently to allow time for those who need to gather their energy and process ideas.
- Focus on creating a valuable discourse, dig deep into insights and allow for thoughtful debate.

Let us know if these ideas work for you and what you have tried to bring everyone into the room effectively!

